

A

MANCHESTER STRIKE.

A Tale.

BY

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NOTICE.

The author hopes that as she has no acquaintance with any one firm, master, or workman in Manchester, she will be spared the imputation of personality. Her personages are all abstractions.

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CHAPTER I.

THE WEEK'S END.

ONE fine Saturday evening in May, 18—, several hundred work-people, men, girls and boys, poured out from the gates of a factory which stood on the banks of the Medlock, near Manchester. The children dispersed in troops, some to play, but the greater number to reach home with all speed, as if they were afraid of the sunshine that chequered the street and reddened the gables and chimnies.

The men seemed in no such haste : they lingered about the factory, one large group standing before the gates, and smaller knots occupying the street for some distance, while a few proceeded slowly on their way home, chatting with one or another party as they went. One only appeared to have nothing to say to his companions, and to wish to get away quietly, if they would have let him. He was one of the most

respectable looking among them, decent in his dress, and intelligent though somewhat melancholy in countenance. He was making his way without speaking to any body, when first one and then another caught him by the button and detained him in consultation. All seemed anxious to know what Allen had to relate or to advise; and Allen had some difficulty in getting leave to go home, much as he knew he was wanted there. When he had at length escaped, he walked so rapidly as presently to overtake his little daughter, Martha, who had left the factory somewhat earlier. He saw her before him for some distance, and observed how she limped, and how feebly she made her way along the street, (if such it might be called,) which led to their abode. It was far from easy walking to the strongest. There were heaps of rubbish, pools of muddy water, stones and brickbats lying about, and cabbage leaves on which the unwary might slip, and bones over which pigs were grunting, and curs snarling and fighting. Little Martha, a delicate child of eight years old, tried to avoid all these obstacles; but she nearly slipped down several times, and started when the dogs came near her, and shivered every time the mild spring breeze blew in her face.

"Martha, how lame you are to-day!" said Allen, taking her round the waist to help her onward.

"O father, my knees have been aching so all day, I thought I should have dropped every moment."

"And one would think it was Christmas by your looks, child, instead of a bright May day."

"It is very chill after the factory," said the little girl, her teeth still chattering. "Sure the weather must have changed, father."

No: the wind was south, and the sky cloudless. It was only that the thermometer had stood at 75° within the factory.

"I suppose your wages are lowered as well as mine," said Allen; "how much do you bring home this week?"

"Only three shillings, father; and some say it will be less before long. I am afraid mother—"

The weak-spirited child could not say what it was that she feared, being choked by her tears.

"Come, Martha, cheer up," said her father. "Mother knows that you get sometimes more and sometimes less; and, after all, you earn as much as a piecer as some do at the hand-loom. There is Field, our neighbour: he and his wife together do not earn more than seven shillings a week, you know, and think how much older and stronger they are than you! We must make you stronger, Martha. I will go with you to Mr. Dawson, and he will find out what is the matter with your knees."

By this time they had reached the foot of the stairs which led up to their two rooms in the third story of a large dwelling which was occupied by many poor families. Barefooted children were scampering up and down these stairs at play; girls nursing babies sat at various elevations, and seemed in danger of being kicked

down as often as a drunken man or an angry woman should want to pass ; a thing which frequently happened. Little Martha looked up the steep stairs and sighed. Her father lifted and carried her. The noises would have stunned a stranger, and they seemed louder than usual to accustomed ears. Martha's little dog came barking and jumping up as soon as he saw her, and this set several babies crying ; the shrill piping of a hulfinch was heard in the din, and over all, the voice of a scolding woman.

" That is Sally Field's voice if it is anybody's," said Allen. " It is enough to make one shift one's quarters to have that woman within hearing."

" She is in our rooms, father. I am sure the noise is there ; and see, her door is open and her room empty."

" She need not fear leaving her door open," observed a neighbour in passing. " There is nothing there that anybody would wish to carry away."

Allen did not answer, but made haste to restore peace in his own dwelling, knowing that his wife was far from being a match for Sally Field. As he flung open the door, the weaker party seemed to resign the contest to him : his wife sank into a chair, trembling all over. Her four or five little ones had hidden themselves where they could, some under the table, some behind the bed, having all been slapped or pushed or buffeted by Sally for staring at her with their thumbs in their mouths. She was not aware that Sally Field in a passion was a sight to make any one stare.

Allen carried Martha to a seat, in preparation for turning out Sally Field and locking the door upon her, which he meant to do by main force if gentler means should fail. Her surprise at seeing him, however, and perhaps some degree of awe of his determined countenance, made her pause for a moment.

"What is all this, wife?" inquired Allen.

"I am sure I don't know. Sally has been rating me and the children this hour past, and heaven knows what for."

Sally proceeded upon this to declare a long list of offences of which Allen's family had been guilty towards her, and Allen suffered her to go on till she had exhausted her breath. When at length she lost her voice—a catastrophe which happens sooner or later to all scolds,—he took up the word.

"I'll tell you what, Sally," said he: "I am very sorry for you, and very much ashamed of you, and I should be more angry on my wife's account than you ever saw me if I did not know you well, and understand what is at the bottom of all this. Remember, Sally, I have known you and your husband since you were this high, as well as if you had been children of my own. Don't put me in mind how young you are. Don't make me treat you like a child when you have taken upon you so early to be a woman. Don't make me call your husband to take care of you as if you could not take care of yourself."

"Call him! call him and welcome, if you

can find him," cried Sally. " Show me where he is, and I'll find a better use for my tongue than in scolding your mean-spirited wife there that looks as if she were going to die whenever one speaks. Go, pray, call my husband."

" Aye, aye: that's the grievance, I see," said Allen. " We all have our grievances; Sally; and it is great folly to make them worse of our own accord. Do you expect to tempt your husband to stay at home with you by scolding as you were doing just now?"

" Do you leave your wife for the twenty-four hours together?" cried Sally. " Do you make yourself drunk with your last shilling!—and yet any man had rather see his wife in a passion now and then than have her such a poor, puny, crying creature as your wife is."

" Hush, hush, mistress!" interrupted Allen. " I will lock the door upon you this moment, and would have done it before but that you would raise a mob in the street if I turned you out. Sally, you know you have not a friend in the world if you quarrel with us, and what will you do with your sore heart then?"

The poor creature's passion now dissolved in tears. She threw herself on the bed and sobbed bitterly. She was left to herself for some time. Allen produced his week's wages, and settled with his wife how they should be disposed of, and persuaded her to go out herself and make the necessary purchases, saying that he would search for Field and try to get him home. Allen's wife sighed.

" You are not afraid to trust me in an ale-house ?" said he smiling.

" Bless your heart, no ; that I never was nor ever shall be : but I was thinking of what you said, that we all have our grievances. Here is three shillings less wages this week."

" Yes, and another sixpence off Martha's too : but don't fret, wife ; we must do as others do, and be glad if nothing worse happens. See to poor Martha's knees before you go out ; she is more lame than ever to-day.—And now, Sally, if you will promise me to go to your own room, and stay there till I bring your husband back, and if you will give me your word to keep the peace with him whatever he may have been doing, I will go and search him out, and see what I can do to make him behave better to you."

Sally promised to keep the peace, but begged to stay and take care of the children till their mother should return. Seeing however that Martha looked up beseechingly in her father's face, and that the little ones clung to their mother's apron, she cursed herself for having deserved that they should be afraid of her, and ran down to bolt herself into her own room and recover her composure as she might.

As there was no fire, and as Martha was very discreet for her years, the parents promised the children to lock them up, that no scold might come and terrify them while they had to take care of themselves. Martha was advised to sit still, and her bulfinch was taken down from the window and placed beside her to be fed and watered ; the other little things promised to be

good, and their father and mother went, the one to the Spread-Eagle and the other to the market.

It required no great sagacity to prophesy that Field would be found at the Spread-Eagle. He varied his excursions a little, according to times and seasons; but those who knew his ways could easily guess at which of his haunts he might be expected when missing from home. When he stole out before getting to his loom in the morning, or after leaving it late at night, he generally stopped only to the dram-shop, for a glass of gin to warm him for his work, or to settle him to his sleep, as his pretence was: but when he had finished his piece and got his pay, he felt himself at liberty to go to the Spread-Eagle and have a carouse, from which he returned in the dark, sometimes reeling on his own legs, sometimes carried on other men's shoulders. This habit of drinking had grown upon him with frightful rapidity. He had, a year before, been described by his employers as a steady, well-behaved lad. He had fallen in love with Sally and married her in a hurry, found her temper disagreeable and his home uncomfortable, tried in vain to keep her in order, and then, giving up all hope, took to drinking, and would not tolerate a word of remonstrance from any one but his old friend Allen.

There were more customers this evening at the Spread-Eagle than was usual even on Saturdays. Allen was warmly welcomed as he entered, for it was supposed he came to keep company with his companions from the same factory. Almost

all present were spinners and power-loom weavers under the firm of Mortimer and Rowe ; and the occasion of their assembling in greater numbers than usual, was the reduction of wages which had that day taken place. Room was made for Allen as soon as he appeared, a pipe and pot of porter called for, and he was welcomed to their consultation. But Allen looked round instead of taking his seat, and inquired for Field. The landlord pointed to a corner where Field lay in a drunken sleep under a bench.

" Let him lie," said one. " He is too far gone to be roused."

" What concern is it of yours ?" cried another. " Come and listen to what Clack was saying."

" You shirked us in the street," said a third : " now we have caught you, we shall not let you go."

The landlord being really of opinion that Field had better lie where he was for an hour or two, Allen sat down to hear what was going on.

Clack turned to him to know what their masters deserved for lowering their wages.

" That depends upon circumstances," replied Allen. " Be they much to blame or little, something must be done to prevent a further reduction, or many of us will be ruined."

" Shake hands, my fine fellow!" cried Clack. " That was just what we had agreed. It is time such tyranny was put down, and we can put it down, and we will."

" Gently, gently," said Allen. " How do you think of putting it down ?"

" Why should not we root out the one who is the most of a tyrant, and then the others may take warning before it is too late? We have nothing to do but to agree."

" No easy matter sometimes, friend."

" Stuff! we have agreed before upon a less occasion, and when there was danger in it. Had not we our combinations, when combination was against the law? and shall not we have them again now that the law lets us alone? Shall we be bold in the day of danger and shrink when that day is over?"

" Well, well, neighbour: I said nothing about being afraid. What would you have us agree to do?"

" To root out Messrs. Mortimer and Rowe. Every man in our union must be sworn not to enter their gates; and if this does not frighten the masters and make them more reasonable, I don't know what will."

" And if instead of being frightened, the masters unite to refuse us work till we give up our stand against Mortimer and Rowe, what are we to do then?"

" To measure our strength against theirs, to be sure. You know they can't do without us."

" Nor we without them; and where both parties are so necessary to each other, it is a pity they should fall out."

" A pity! To be sure it is a pity; but if the masters drive us to it, the blame rests with them."

" I hope," said a timid-looking man, Hare by

name, who had a habit of twisting his hat when silent, and of scratching his head when he spoke.—“ I hope, neighbour, you will think what you are about before you mention a strike. I’ve seen enough of strikes. I had rather see my children on the parish than strike.”

Clack looked disdainfully at him, and said it was well that some dove-like folks had not to manage a fight against the eagle. For his part, he thought any man ought to be proud of the honour of making a stand against any oppression; and that he had rather, for his own share, have the thanks of the Union Committee than wear Wellington’s star. Would not his friend Allen say the same?

No. Allen agreed with Hare so far as thinking that there could be few worse evils than a strike; but at the same time, it was an evil which might become necessary in certain cases. When convinced that it was necessary in defence of the rights of the working-man, he would join in it heart and hand; but never out of spite or revenge,—never to root out any master breathing.—So many agreed in this opinion, that Clack grew more eager than ever in defending himself and blaming the masters in question.

“ Dare any one say,” he cried, “ that the Dey of Algiers himself is a greater tyrant than Mortimer would be if he dared? Does not he look as if he would trample us under foot if he could? Does not he smile with contempt at whatever is said by a working-man? Does not he spurn every complaint, and laugh at every threat? and

if he takes it into his lofty head to do a kindness, does not he make it bitter with his pride?"

" All true, Clack, as every body knows that works for Mortimer; but——"

" And as for Rowe," interrupted the talker, " he is worse, if possible, in his way."

" I don't know," said Hare, doubtfully. " Mr. Rowe came once, and talked very kindly with me."

" Aye, when he had some purpose to answer. We are all, except you, Hare, wise enough to know what Rowe's pretty speeches mean. You should follow him to the next masters' meeting, man, and hear how he alters his tone with his company. The mean-spirited, shuffling knave!"

" Well, well, Clack: granting that Mortimer is tyrannical and Rowe not to be trusted,—that does not alter the case about rooting them out. To make the attempt is to acknowledge at the outset that the object of our union is a bad one: it will fill the minds of the operatives with foul passions and provoke a war between masters and men which will end in the destruction of both. Whenever we do strike, let it be in defence of our own rights, and not out of enmity to individuals among our employers."

Clack muttered something about there being shufflers among the men as well as the masters; to which Allen replied that the way to make shufflers was to use intimidation. The more wisdom and moderation there was in the proceedings of any body of men, the better chance

there was of unanimity and determination. He repeated that, as long as the Union of which he was a member kept in view the interests of the body of operatives, he would be found ready to do and to sacrifice his share: but as soon as it should set to work on other objects, he should withdraw at all risks.

Before he had done speaking, the attention of his companions was called off by an unexpected addition to their company. Music had been heard gradually approaching for some minutes, and now the musician stood darkening the door, and almost deafening the people within with the extraordinary variety of sounds he produced. An enormous drum was strapped across his body; a Pan's pipe employed his mouth, and his hat, with a pointed crown and a broad brim, was garnished with bells. A little girl, fantastically dressed, performed on the triangle, and danced, and collected halfpence from the bystanders. While the musician played a jig, jerking his head incessantly from side to side, nobody thought of looking particularly at him: but when he turned to the company within doors and set his little companion to sing to his playing

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot,"

several of the debaters began to fancy that they knew the face and figure of the musician. "It is—yes, it certainly is Bray!" said one to another; and many a hand was held out to him.

"I thought you were not likely to forget old acquaintance, even if they come in a new dress,"

said Bray, laughing heartily, and proceeding to deposit his decorations with one or another of his former companions. He put his hat on Allen's head, slipped the strap of his drum over Clack's shoulders, and gave the triangle to Hare.

"Come," said he, "let us have a concert. It is my turn to see spinners turn strollers. Come, Allen, shake your head, man, and let us hear what comes out of it."

"How we have wondered," exclaimed Allen, "what had become of you and yours! Is that poor little Hannah that used to be so delicate?"

"The same that your good wife nursed through the measles. She would hardly know her now."

Allen shook his head.

"Ah, I see what you mean," said Bray. "You had rather see her covered with white cotton flakes than with yellow ribands; but remember it is no fault of mine that she is not still a piecer in yonder factory; and I don't know that I need call it my misfortune any more than my fault. Look how strong and plump she is! so much for living in the open air, instead of being mewed up in a place like an oven. Now, don't take off the hat on purpose to shake your head. What can a man do —" and looking round, he appealed to the company, "what can a proscribed man do but get his living, so as not to have to ask for work?"

A loud clapping and shuffling of feet was the answer to his question. The noise half roused

the drunken man in the corner, who rolled himself over to the tower of little Hannah, who had got as far as she could out of the way of the smokers, among whom her father had been so well received. Allen rose to go, having some hope that Field might be safely set on his legs again by this time. He asked Bray whether he meant to stay in the neighbourhood, and where he would lodge.

" You must stay," cried one, " and play a tune before your old masters' gates."

" You must stay," said another, " and see how we manage a strike now-a-days."

" A strike ! Are you going to try your strength again ? You will make me wish I was one of you still ; but I can head the march. Stay ? Yes, I'll stay and lead you on to victory. Hurra ! I'll go recruiting with my drum. I'll manage to meet Mortimer, when I have a procession a mile long at my heels !"

" You lay by your drum on Sundays, I suppose ?" said Allen.

" Yes, yes. We keep within and take our rest on Sundays. It is as great a treat to us to sit within doors all day once a week, as it is to some other folks to get into the green meadows. If the landlord can give us lodgings, you will find us here in the morning, Allen."

" Let Hannah go home with me, Bray. I know my wife will be glad to see her and to hear her story, and this is no place for a child. If I can rouse yon sleeper, I will go now, and send my wife with a cloak or something to hide

the child's frippery, and then she will spend to-morrow in a fitter place than a public-house."

Bray sat gravely looking at his child for a few moments, and then started up, saying that he would undertake to rouse the sleeper. Blowing the Pan's pipe close by his ear made him start, and a rub-a-dub on the drum woke him up effectually : so that he was able, cross and miserable, to crawl homewards with the help of Allen's arm, and to be put to bed by his wife, with the indistinct dread in his mind of a terrible lecture as soon as he should be in a condition to listen to it.

CHAPTER II. CHILD'S GOSSIP.

MUCH business was transacted at the Spread-Eagle on the Sunday by the Committee of the Union. It was the general opinion that a great struggle between masters and men was on the eve of taking place, and measures were adopted for finding out what was the disposition of the operative spinners respecting a general strike, if an equalization of wages was not to be obtained by other means. It had been agreed on the Saturday night, that twenty-five members of the Union should employ the Sunday in obtaining the

names of so many as were willing to sign their names to subscribe for the assistance of those who should turn out, in case of opposition from the masters. These twenty-five men were to bring in their reports on Sunday night; after which, if the affair should look promising, a petition was to be addressed to the masters, for a public meeting, at which an equalization of wages was to be agreed on.

Clack was somewhat at a loss how to oppose his own business, and that of other people, on this occasion. Having a very high opinion of his own powers of persuasion, and being confident of his knowledge of law, he wanted to be everywhere at once, and to guide all the movements of the people he employed. As this was impossible, however, he thought it best to remain in some known place of appeal where parties might come to him for direction and information. He therefore sat at the Spread-Eagle all day, big with importance, and dissatisfied only because his underlings could not be about their business abroad, and listening to him at the same time.

The Allens knew nothing of what was going forward. Mrs. Allen was so full of interest and curiosity about little Hannah Bray, that she had no thoughts to bestow on public affairs, as the transactions of the Union were commonly called. Her husband had gone early into the country with Bray, this day drear like other people, to visit some relations of the latter, who did not know what had become of him after he had been

refused employment in Manchester, and obliged to betake himself to some new mode of obtaining a livelihood.

Little Hannah slept till the sun was high on the Sunday morning, and might have slept longer, if Mrs. Allen had not feared she would not get breakfast over in time for church. Hannah jumped up with the excuse that the place was so quiet, there was nothing to wake her.

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Allen. "We think the children and the neighbours make a great deal of noise; but I suppose you sleep in public-houses for the most part."

Hannah observed that people call so loud for what they want in public-houses, and they care so little for hours, that there is no knowing when you may sleep quietly.

"Have you no other frock than that, my dear?" asked Mrs. Allen. "I suppose you go to church on Sundays, and you cannot possibly go in all those gay ribands."

"O no," said Hannah, "I have a dark frock for Sundays, and a straw bonnet; but they are in father's pack, and I suppose that is at the Spread-Eagle."

"And he is going into the country for the day. Well, you must change with Martha when church time comes. Poor Martha has but one tidy frock; but she is too lame to go out to-day, even as far as the apothecary's; and I am sure she will lend you her frock and tippet to go to church in."

Martha was willing to tend, but had rather put on her factory dress than Hannah's red frock with yellow trimmings. Hannah hinted that she should like to stay within with Martha all day; and the indulgent mother, seeing Martha's pleasure at the prospect of a companion and nurse of her own age, left the little girls to amuse themselves, while she took the younger children to church with her as usual.

"Father says he heard you sing last night," said Martha when they were left alone. "Will you sing to me?"

"I am so tired of singing!" pleaded Hannah. "I don't know many songs, and I sing them so very oftch! Won't that bird do as well? Let me get down the cage, may I?"

"Yes, do, and we will give him some water, poor fellow! He is my bird, and I feed him every day. Somebody that could not afford to keep him sold him to father, and father gave him to me. Had you ever a bird?"

"No, but I had a monkey once. When we went away, father got a monkey, and I used to lead him about with a string; but I was glad when we had done with him, he was so mischievous. Look here how he tore my arm one day, when somebody had put him in a passion with giving him empty nutshells."

"What a terrible place!" said Martha. "Was it long in getting well?"

"No; father got an apothecary to tie it up, and it soon got well."

"My father is going to show my knees to

Mr. Dawson, the apothecary. Do look how they are swelled; and they ache so, you can't think."

"O, but I can think, for mine used to ache terribly when I walked and stood before the wheels all day."

"But yours were never so bad as mine, or I am sure you could not dance about as you do."

"No not so bad, to be sure, and my arms were never so shrunk away as yours. Look, my arm is twice as big as yours."

"I wonder what's the reason," sighed Martha. "Mother says I get thinner and thinner."

"You should have meat for dinner every day as I have," said Hannah, "and then you would grow fat like me. Father gets such good dinners for us to what we used to have. He says 'tis that, and being in the air so much that prevents my being sickly, as I used to be. I don't think I could do the work that I used to do with all that noise, and the smell of oil, and the heat."

"And I am sure I could not sing and dance as you do."

"No, how should you dance when you are so lame?"

"And I don't think I can sing at all."

"Come, try, and I will sing with you. Try 'God save the king!'"

"It is Sunday," said Martha gravely.

"Well, I thought people might sing 'God save the king' on Sundays. I have heard father play it on the drum, just before the Old Hundred. You knew the Old Hundred."

Martha had heard this hymn-time at church, and she tried to sing it : but Hannah burst out a laughing.

"Lord ! Martha, your voice is like a little twittering bird's. Can't you open your mouth and sing this way ?"

"No, I can't," said Martha, quite out of breath; "and besides, Hannah, you should not say 'Lord !' Father and mother never let us say those sort of words."

"Nor my father either. He is more angry with me for that, than for anything ; but it slips out somehow ; and you would not wonder if you knew how often I hear people say that, and many worse things."

"Worse things?" said Martha, looking curious.

"Yes ; much worse things ; but I am not going to tell you what they are, because father made me promise not to tell you about any of the bad people that I have heard swear and seen tipsy. Was your father ever tipsy ?"

"Not that I know of ; but our neighbour Field is often tipsy. I am afraid every day that he will topple down stairs."

"My father was tipsy once," said Hannah, "and he beat me so, you can't think."

"When ? Lately ?"

"No, just after we began to stroll. Though it is so long ago, I remember it very well, for I was never so frightened in my life. I did not know where to go to get away from him ; and the people pushed him about and laughed at me the

more the more I cried. I asked him afterwards not to get tipsy any more, and he said he never would, and he never has. It was only because we had got more money that day than we ever got in a day before : but it soon went away, for when father woke the next morning, his pocket was quite empty."

" And did you soon get some more money ?"

" O yes : we get some every day except Sundays. I carry the hat round every time we stop to play, and I always get some halfpence and sometimes a silver sixpence."

" Ah ! then, you get a great deal more than I do, Hannah. I brought home only three shillings this week."

" I take much more than that, to be sure ; but then it is my father's earning more than mine. His great drum sounds further and brings more people to listen than my triangle."

" Is your triangle here ? I wish you would teach me to play," said Martha. " Now do. If you will, I will ask mother to show us the pictures in grandfather's bible when she comes home."

Hannah had been very fond of these pictures when she was recovering from the measles ; and this bribe and her goodnature together overcame her disgust at the instrument she had to play every day and almost all day long. She indulged herself with a prodigious yawn, and then began her lesson. When Mrs. Allen came back, she found the bulfinch piping at his loudest pitch to the accompaniment of the triangle, Hannah

screaming her instructions to her new pupil, and poor palefaced little Martha flushed with flattery and with the grand idea of earning a great many silver sixpences every day if her father would let her make music in the streets instead of going to the factory.

CHAPTER III.

NO UNION OF MASTERS.

THE achievements of the twenty-five who canvassed for support during Sunday were such as to put Clack into high spirits. The list of names with signatures or marks annexed, amounted to several thousands ; and if the orator had been allowed to have his own way, he would have proclaimed war against the masters at once, and the turn-out would have begun on the Monday morning : but there were a few soberer folks than himself engaged in the consultation ; and these smiled at his brag of the many thousand pounds that would pour in from Leeds, Coventry, Liverpool, Glasgow, and other places, and insisted upon offering the masters the option of a peaceable agreement before any measures of opposition were taken.

Clack retorted that these men were afraid of their wives, and declared that they might wait

long for a strike if it was necessary to refrain till the women voted for it, since there was never a woman yet who did not hate a turn-out as she would the plague.

This observation called forth some jokes at his expense, for Clack was known to be engaged to be married, and it was thought he spoke from awkward experience. In the eagerness of defence, he went a step too far. He asked if it was likely, knowing the disposition of the women on this subject, that he should consult any woman breathing as to the part he should take, or provoke opposition from any female tongue, or care for it if he should happen to meet with it. These words were, as he might have expected, carried to the ears which should never have heard them, and prevented his next meeting with his betrothed from being the pleasantest in the world. While a storm was brewing at a distance in consequence of his indiscreet boast, Clack made himself very merry with those who were less bold than himself.

"Where is Hare to-day? Henpecked, I warrant. Did not he promise faithfully to be one of the twenty-five?"

"Yes, and he is nowhere to be found," said a neighbour.

"But I wonder, Clack, you troubled yourself to take a promise from such a shilly-shally fellow as Hare. His being married has nothing to do with it: he was never in the same mind for an hour together from his youth up."

"How did he get married then?"

"O there was another and a steadier mind concerned in that matter, you know: not that I mean any harm against his wife : she is as mild as she is sensible. I only mean that her judgment strengthens his when they have to act together."

"Then I suppose she does not like the idea of a strike any better than the other women, and persuades him not to come?"

"More likely she knows nothing of it. If there is one thing rather than another that Hare is afraid of, it is combination. That imprisonment of his father under the old combination laws made him a coward for life; and there is no use in telling him that the law leaves us to manage our own business now as long as we keep the peace."

"He does, indeed, make a pitiful figure between his dread of belonging to the Union and his horror of being left out. But why do we waste our breath upon him? Who has seen Allen to-day, and why does he not come? We shall count his modesty for backwardness if he does not take care."

"Don't be in a hurry to blame a better man than yourself," said a neighbour. "Allen has been in the country all day."

There was no offence in such a comparison; for Allen was generally looked up to as the first man in that branch of the Union, though he was so little aware of his own merits that he did not come forward so much as he should have done,

except on urgent occasions ; and then he never failed to do all that was expected of him.

When the petition to the masters to hold a public meeting was prepared, and when Clack had appointed himself and two others to carry it round the next day, the Committee terminated their present sitting.

The first firm to which the deputies addressed their petition was that of Mortimer and Rowe.

"Are the partners at home ?" they inquired.

"I don't know whether Mr. Mortimer is here yet, but there is Mr. Rowe. Sir ! Mr. Rowe !" called the clerk, as he saw the junior partner making his escape, "these men wish to speak with you, sir, if you please."

Mr. Rowe, perceiving that he had been seen, came forward to be spoken with.

"A public meeting,—equalization of wages,—aye, very fair : hum ! very well, my good fellows. Well : what do you want me to do ?"

"To give your voice in favour of this public meeting."

"Why, you know you have a good friend in me. You surely cannot anticipate any difficulty with me. I am a friend of peace, you know. No man more so."

"Aye, sir : but there is more than one sort of peace. The masters have called it peace when they had all their own way, and their men were cowed by the law and dared not openly resist. The men call it peace when the two parties have confidence in each other, and make a cordial

agreement, and keep to it. This is what we want at the present time."

So said Gibson, whose turn it was to be spokesman ; but Clack could not help putting in his word.

" And if either party refuses peace, you know, sir, the next thing is war."

" O, no war !" said Mr. Rowe. " A cordial agreement, as you say, is the right thing. So, for this purpose you wish for a public meeting. Well; I shall be happy to attend a public meeting, if—"

" We are happy to find you so agreeable, sir. Will you just sign for self and partner, if you please."

" Sign ! I see no signatures."

" Because you happen to be the first person we have applied to, sir; that is all. We hope for signatures plenty before the day is over. Will you please to sign, as you approve of the meeting ?"

Mr. Rowe suddenly recollect ed that he must consult his partner who sat in a back room. The men had not to wait long. The junior partner, indeed, did not appear again, but Mr. Mortimer issued forth, looking not a whit less haughty than usual. He begged the deputies would make the best of their way off his premises, as he had nothing to say to them.

What were his sentiments respecting the meeting, if they might inquire ?

His sentiments were, that the masters had been far too tolerant already of the complaints of the men ; and that it was time the lower orders were

taught their proper place. He had neither leisure nor inclination to argue with any of them, either there or elsewhere; so the sooner they took themselves off the better.

" You may live to change your sentiments, sir," observed Gibson.

" Beware of threats!" said Mr. Mortimer. " There is law yet for the punishment of threats, remember."

" I have neither forgotten the law, Mr. Mortimer, nor used threats. I said, and I say again, you may live to change your sentiments; and, for your own sake, it is to be hoped you will. Good morning, sir."

" He is too busy even to wish us good morning," observed Clack. " How coolly he looked over the letter he took from his clerk, as if we were not worth attending to for a moment!"

" Haughty as he is," said Gibson, " I would sooner bear with his pride than Rowe's behaviour or Elliott's."

" They are young men, Gibson, and Mortimer is old, and we would sooner bear with an old man's mistakes than a young man's, be they what they may! Where next? To Elliott's?"

" Yes, we are sure of being ill-treated there; so the sooner it is over the better."

As they approached Mr. Elliott's house, they perceived that gentleman mounted on his favourite hunter, and in the act of leaving his own door. He was too much occupied with his own affairs to see them coming, for the most important part of his morning's business was setting off for his ride; and he had eyes for little else

while he was admiring the polish of his boots, adjusting his collar, settling the skirts of his coat, and patting his horse's neck. Clack was not the man for ceremony; he came straight up before the horse, and laid his hand on the handsome new rein, saying, "By your leave, sir—"

"Hands off," cried Elliott, giving him a cut across the knuckles with his riding-whip. "How dare you stop me? How dare you handle my rein with your greasy fingers?"

"How would you get such a rein, I wonder, sir, if we did not grease our fingers in your service?" said Clack, indignantly.

"I'm in a hurry," said Elliott; "you can speak to the people within, if you want any thing."

"We will not detain you, sir," said Taylor, who was now spokesman, "but nobody but yourself can answer our question." And he told the story in a few words, and put the petition into the gentleman's hands.

Elliott glanced his eye over it as well as the restlessness of his horse would permit, and then struck it contemptuously with his riding-whip into the mud, swore that that was the proper place for such a piece of insolence, rode up against the men, and pranced down the street without bestowing another look or word upon them.

"Pride comes before a fall; let the gentleman take care of himself," said Gibson, quietly picking up the petition and wiping off the mud with his handkerchief.

Clack talked about using his greasy fingers to cram the soiled petition down the gentleman's

throat, and seemed disposed to harangue the laughing bystanders ; but his more prudent companions took him by the arm and led him away. Mr. Elliott's clerk, who had seen the whole proceeding from an upper window, and was ashamed of his master's conduct, came after them, out of breath, to ask them in while he copied the petition, which was not, as he observed, fit to show to any other gentleman. Gibson thanked him for his civility, but observed that the soiled paper would tell part of their story better than they could tell it themselves. The clerk, therefore, slowly returned, saying to himself that it is a pity when young men, coming to a large fortune obtained in trade, forget by whose means their wealth was acquired, and by what tenure it is held.

After visiting several manufacturers, some of whom were more and others less favourable to their claims than they expected, the deputies requested an interview with Mr. Wentworth. Mr. Wentworth had been rich as a young man, had failed through unavoidable misfortunes, and had worked his way up again to a competence, after having paid every shilling he owed. He was now an elderly man, homely in his person, somewhat slovenly in his dress, not much given to talk, and, when he did speak, causing some surprise and weariness to strangers by the drawling twang of his speech. Those who knew him well, however, had rather hear his voice than any music ; and such of his men as belonged to the Union agreed that ten words from him were worth a speech of an hour long from Clack. There was,

to be sure, no need for so many words from him as from other people, for he practised a great variety of inarticulate sounds, the meaning of which was well understood by those accustomed to converse with him, and served all the purposes of a reply.

Mr. Wentworth was sitting at his desk when the deputies were introduced. As they uncovered their heads and made their bow, some murmurings and clutterings reached them which they understood as a welcome. He looked steadily at them from under his shaggy eyebrows while they explained their business, and then took the petition to look over.

" You can hardly have any paper-makers in your Union," said he, chuckling as he unfolded the sheet; " or are you saving your pence against a strike, that you can't afford paper as fair as your writing ? "

" Aye, aye ; wait a while and you will see him grow wiser," was his observation on hearing the story of Elliott's insolence. " We were all boys before we were men.—Hum :—equalization.—Who will avouch that this equalization is all that you want ? "

" I, sir," said the ever-ready Clack.—" I drew it up, and so I ought to know."

Gibson observed, that though no further object was expressly contemplated by the Union, he would not answer for their not increasing their demands as they proceeded. If there was any attempt to equalize the wages by reducing all to the lowest now given, the Union would demand an advance.

"Who gives the lowest?" inquired Mr. Wentworth.

"Except some upstarts whom we can easily manage, Mortimer and Rowe give the lowest, and you, sir, the next lowest, and Elliott the highest."

"Who was lamenting lately that the combination laws were repealed, so that the masters cannot be prosecuted for oppression? Who proposed to burn them in effigy, tied to one another's necks?"

The deputies looked at one another, and then answered that all this was only private talk at one of their meetings; it was never meant for earnest.

"Well, I only let you know that you may look about your Committee room and find where the little bird builds that carries the matter; and if you can't find her, take care that she has nothing to carry that you would be ashamed to own. Did you learn from her that the masters combine against you?"

"We learn it from our own eyes, and ears, and senses," said Clack. "Have not masters oppressed their men from the beginning of the world?"

"Indeed I don't know," said Mr. Wentworth. "If Adam had a gardener under him in Paradise, they might have tried to turn one another out, but I never heard of it."

"Stuff and nonsense, sir, begging your pardon. Don't we know that masters always have lorded it over the poor? They were born with a silver spoon in their mouths, and—"

"I wonder where mine is," observed Mr. Wentworth; "I will look in my mother's plate chest for it."

The orator went on,—

"They openly treat us like slaves as long as they can, and when we will bear it no longer, they plot in secret against us. They steal to one another's houses when they think we are asleep; they bolt their doors and fill their glasses to their own prosperity, and every bumper that goes down their throats is paid for with the poor man's crust."

"They must have made the little bird tipsy, Clack, before she carried you such a strange story as that."

"Don't tell me, sir, that it is not true! Don't tell me!"

"I am not telling you anything; for the plain reason, that I have nothing to tell. I only want to ask you one or two things, as you seem to know so much more than we do. Pray what have the masters combined for just now?"

"To lower our wages, to be sure."

"And yet Mortimer pays one rate, and I another, and Elliott another. Why don't I ask as much labour for my money as Mortimer?"

"You dare not," cried Clack.

"You know it's not fair," said Taylor.

"You are not the man to grind the poor," said Gibeon.

"You have not hit it, any of you. You all seem to think it is a matter of pure choice with us, what wages we give."

"To be sure," said Clack, "and that is the reason we want parliament to settle the matter at once and for ever."

"Parliament has no more choice in the matter than we masters," drily observed Mr. Wentworth. "If ever Parliament passes a bill to regulate wages, we must have a rider put to it to decree how much rain must fall before harvest."

Clack muttered something about not standing any longer to be trifled with; but his companions thought it possible that Mr. Wentworth might have something to say that was worth hearing, and persuaded the orator to be quiet. Gibson inquired,—

"Where then does the choice rest, sir, if neither with the government nor the masters?"

"Such power as there is rests with those who take, not with those who give wages. Not such power as tips our friend's tongue there," nodding at Clack, "not such power as you gain by the most successful strike, not such power as combination gives you, be it peaceable or threatening; but a much more lasting power which cannot be taken from you. The power of the masters is considerable, for they hold the administration of capital; but it is not on this that the rate of wages depends. It depends on the administration of labour; and this much greater power is in your hands."

The deputies thought that they who pay wages must always have power over those who receive.

"That is as much as saying that wages are a gift. I thought you had supposed them your right."

All were eager to urge the rights of industry.

"Aye, all very true ; no right can be clearer when we see what wages are. Come, Clack, tell us, (for who knows if you don't?) tell us what wages Adam gave his under gardeners. You can't say? Why, I thought you knew all that the masters did at the beginning of the world. Well, when Adam was some hundred years old, (you may trust me, for I am descended from him in a straight line,) he said to Eve, 'Stay you here and spin with the women, while I go yonder and set my men to delve ; and don't expect us back in a hurry, for tillage is tough work here to what it was in Eden, and we must gather our crops before we can bring them to market. Come, my good fellows, work hard and you shall have your shares.' 'And pray, sir,' said the men, 'what are we to live upon while our fruit and vegetables are growing?' 'Why,' says Adam, 'instead of my sharing the fruit with you when it is grown, suppose you take your portion in advance. It may be a convenience to you, and it is all the same thing to me.' So the men looked at the ground, and calculated how much digging and other work there would be, and then named their demand ; not in silver money with king George's head upon it, but food and clothing, and tools."

"Then at harvest time," observed Gibson, "the whole produce belonged to Adam?"

"Of course. The commodity was made up, like all commodities, of capital and labour : Adam's capital and the men's labour."

"And of a deal besides," cried Clack. "If it was grain, there was the root, and the stalk, and the ear; and if it was fruit, there was the rind, and the pulp, and the juice."

"Begging your pardon, friend, there was nothing but capital and labour. Without labour, and the soil and the tools which made the capital, there would have been neither grain nor fruit; and if grain and fruit grew wild, they could be no commodity without labour, any more than the diamond in the mine, and the pearl in the sea, are a commodity before the one is dug, and the other fished up. Well, Adam and his men expected to get as much by their crop as would pay for their subsistence and their toil: and this much the men asked, and Adam was willing to give, and a fair surplus remained over for himself. So they made their bargain, and he bought their share of the commodity, and had to himself all the flax and other things that his produce exchanged for in the market. And so that season passed off, and all were contented."

"And what happened next season, sir?"

"Next season, twice the number of men came to ask work in the same plot of ground. Adam told them that he had very little more wages to pay away than he had the year before, so that if they all wanted to work under him they must be content with little more than half what each had formerly earned. They agreed, and submitted to be rather pinched; but they hoped it would be only for a time, as it was a very fine harvest indeed, so much labour having been spent upon

it, and there being a fine profit into Adam's pocket."

"Did they wear pockets then, sir?"

"No doubt; for the women were improving their tailoring, as much as the men their gardening, and expecting, like them, to increase their gains in consequence; and so they would have done, but that four times the number of labourers appeared next year, so that notwithstanding the increase of capital, each had not so much as one-third the original wages; and the men grew very cross, and their wives very melancholy. But how could Adam help it?"

"Why did not the men carry their labour elsewhere?" asked Clack contemptuously.

"Why do you go on spinning for Mortimer and Rowe, when Elliott pays higher wages?"

"Because nobody is taking on new hands. I can't get work."

"Well, nobody was taking on new hands in Adam's neighbourhood; all the capital was already employed."

"But I don't mean to go on so," said Clack. "I shall strike with all the rest of Mortimer's men, if we don't get better paid."

"Aye, it is as I thought, Clack. Adam's head labourer was your grandfather, for he said just the same thing you are saying; and what is more, he did it. They all turned out, every man of them, and let the field take care of itself."

"And what happened?"

"Only half a harvest came up; so that, of course, wages were lower than ever next year. The

worst folly of all was that they went on to blame Adam, though he showed them that the harvest would not even pay its own expenses ; much less leave anything to divide between him and them. ‘ You talk to me,’ says he, ‘ as if I could get capital down from the clouds as fast as I please : whereas you might have seen from the beginning, that I have a certain quantity and no more. If you choose to bring a thousand labourers to live upon the capital which was once divided among a hundred, it is your fault and not mine that you are badly off.’ ”

“ If the thousand men agreed to live for so little, it was their own affair, to be sure.”

“ And if they did not agree, their bidding against each other could not shift the blame upon Adam. If there was such competition among the men as enabled him to obtain more labour for the same wages, he was not to blame, was he, for employing three men for what he had at first paid to one ? ”

“ Nor were the men to blame, sir, for bargaining for such wages as were to be had.”

“ Certainly.. Where then was the evil ? ”

“ Clearly in there being too many hands for the work to be done,” replied Gibson. “ But who could help that, sir ? ”

“ Nobody could relieve the immediate pressure, Gibson, unless some had the means of taking themselves off, or of applying their labour to some employment which was less overstocked ; but all had it in their power to prevent the evil returning. By foresight and care, labour may

be proportioned to capital as accurately as my machinery to the power of my steam-engine."

"What has all this to do with our petition?" asked the orator, who was impatient of remaining so long in the background.

"A great deal," replied Gibson. "Mr. Wentworth means to point out how much rests with the masters, and how much with the men, and to warn us against a strike. But, sir, about equalization of wages: you think that fair enough, I suppose. In the very same market, and under the very same circumstances, labour ought to be paid at the same rate, surely?"

"One circumstance, you know, is the extent of the master's capital, which is seldom the same in any two cases, and on which his power of waiting for his returns depends. But I agree with you that a man cannot safely lower his rate of wages much and permanently below that of his competitors, and that an equalization of wages is desirable for all parties; so I will sign my agreement to your wish for a public meeting. Coming, Charles, coming."

Gibson had observed Mr. Wentworth's old gray pony in the yard for some time, and he now saw that Charles looked tired of leading it backwards and forwards, while the animal turned its head one way and another, as if looking for its usually punctual master. While helping the gentleman on with the heavy great-coat, which he wore winter and summer, the deputy apologized for having kept the rider and his steed so long asunder.

"Never mind," drawled Mr. Wentworth. "Dobbin and I have two rounds, a long, and a short; and I dare say he has made up his mind already which it will be to-day. If I have helped you to a short cut to your business, you will not think your time wasted any more than I." Then as he buttoned the last button, and pulled his hat over his brows, "That's well; all tight. Hey ho, Dobbin! Good day to ye all."

The shaggy pony pricked up his ears, quickened his pace, and well nigh nodded to his master at the sound of his voice. When Mr. Wentworth scrambled up into the saddle and left the yard at a funeral pace, the deputies looked with much more respect on him and his equipage, than on the brilliant spectacle they had met at Elliott's door.

CHAPTER IV.

UNION OF MEN.

As soon as it was ascertained that, though many of the masters declined committing themselves by signing their names, most, or all of them would attend the desired meeting, Clack took upon himself to issue a placard, whose large red and black letters attracted the eyes of all who could read. It made known the intention of the

masters to meet at the York Hotel, on the Wednesday afternoon, and of the Committee of the men to hold a previous meeting at the Spread Eagle, in the morning, in order to prepare resolutions to be laid before the masters. The Committee was to be escorted to and fro by a circuitous route by a procession; and the place appointed where those were to meet who wished to make a part of the show, was St. George's Fields. The placard began and ended by an appeal to the people to guard their rights against oppression. Many were surprised at the anxiety of the leading men among the spinners to disown this placard. It seemed to the crowd very spirited and eloquent, and they began to look out their decorations for the procession.

Bray was one of the first on the spot, piping, drumming, and shaking his bells at the appearance of every new group. Other musicians joined the train, flags were displayed, the women gathered to look on, the children cheered and brought green boughs, and all had the appearance of rejoicing, though it would have been difficult for any one to say what there was to rejoice about. Many had no clear idea of what was doing or going to be done: some had no idea at all, and those who knew best thought it a pity that such a display should have been made as might bear the appearance of being intended to intimidate the masters. The Committee were so generally of this opinion, that they did not attend, but went quietly, one by one, to the Spread Eagle; so that, in fact, the procession

was formed to escort Clack, and nobody else. This was all the more glorious for him, he thought; and he walked proudly just behind the chief musician, Bray, now shaking hands from side to side, now bowing with his hand on his heart, now bidding all halt and giving the signal for groans or cheers. There were three groans at Mortimer and Rowe's, and three cheers at Elliott's, which were received with infinite disdain by that gentleman as he sat at his breakfast table, balancing his egg-spoon and glancing at the newspaper. The procession next overtook Mr. Wentworth in Chancery Lane, pacing to business on his gray pony. All eyes were turned to Clack for a signal whether to groan or cheer. There was, in the meanwhile, a faint beginning of each, at which the pony looked more astonished than his master, who only chuckled and murmured in his usual manner as he looked upon the assemblage with a quiet smile.

"What do you expect to get by this fine show?" said he to a youth near him.

"Cheap bread! Hurrah!" cried the lad, waving his bludgeon, and wishing there was a loaf on the top of it.

"And you, and you, and you?" said Mr. Wentworth, to one and another as they passed.

"No potato peelings! Reform and good wages! Liberty and cheap bread!" cried they, according to their various notions. The children's only idea was (and it was the wisest) that it was a holiday, with a procession and a band of music.

When Clack had got a little a-head of the slow-moving pony and its rider, he decided to halt and hold a short parley. Advancing with a bow, he said,

" You call yourself the poor man's friend, I believe, sir ? "

" No man's enemy, I hope," replied Mr. Wentworth.

" Then allow us the honour of giving you three cheers on your pledge to support our interests this evening. Hats off ! "

" Better wait awhile," said Mr. Wentworth. " Cheers will keep, and I dislike unnecessary pledges."

Clack looked suspicious, and nods and winks went round.

" We might differ, you know, as to what your interests are, and then I might seem to break my word when I did not mean it."

" Let him go free," said a bystander. " He knows the consequences if he opposes us."

" That is rather a strange way of letting me go free," observed the gentleman, smiling. " However, friend, threats are empty air to a man who knows his own mind ; and my mind is made up to consider the interests of all, come groans, come cheers."

" It is not everybody, sir, who would speak so independently,—to our faces too."

" True, friend. All the masters and all the men have not my years, and have not learned to look steadily in honest faces ; and that is why I am sorry to see this parade, which looks too much

like intimidation. Come now, be persuaded. I will give you house-room for your flags, and my old friend Bray there shall not lose his job ; he shall make it a holyday to the children in my factory."

It was too much to ask of Clack. He could not give up his procession, and so made haste to march on. As Mr. Wentworth turned in at his factory gate in Ancoats Street, every man in the long train bowed respectfully. In his case, the regard of his neighbours was not measured by the rate of wages he paid.

The procession, having deposited Clack at the Spread Eagle, was by no means so ready to depart as to arrive. They insisted that it should be an open meeting, and that they should have a voice in the demands to be offered to the masters. They rushed through the house to the skittle-ground behind, caused a table with paper and ink to be placed in an arbour, and, setting the Committee entirely aside on the plea that this was a special occasion, began to call aloud for Allen to take the chair. Allen was nowhere to be found on the premises, for the good reason that he was at his work, and knew little of what was going on. Being sent for, he presently appeared and asked what he was wanted for.

"To take the chair."

But Allen was too modest to accept the honour at a word : he drew back, and urged his being totally unused to come forward at public meetings, and named several who understood the management of that kind of business better than himself. Those that he named were all single

men ; for he bore in mind,—and this certainly added to his reluctance,—that the sin of taking a prominent part in a combination of workmen, is apt to be remembered against the sinner when the days of trouble are over ; and he felt that a family man was not the one who ought to be made to incur the risk.—When further pressed, he did not scruple to declare this to be one of his objections ; but the people were in the humour to overcome objections, and they promised faithfully, that he and his family should not be injured : that if discharged from the factory, they should be maintained by the Union ; and that as no one knew so much of their affairs as Allen, as he could express himself with moderation in speech, and with ease on paper, he was the man to be at the head of their affairs, and that it was his bounden duty to accept the office.

Allen could not deny this, and did not, therefore, dally with his duty ; but it cost him a bitter pang. While Clack listened and looked on with a feeling of jealousy, and thought it a moment of triumph such as he would fain have enjoyed himself, he little knew how little Allen was to be envied. He could not guess what feelings rushed on Allen's mind at the moment that he took the decisive step into the arbour and seated himself at the table, and received the pen into his hand. Thoughts of the dismay of his timid wife, of the hardships to which he might expose his children, of the difficulties of his office, and the ill-will which its discharge must sometimes bring upon him,—thoughts of the quarrels in which he

must mediate, and of the distress which, in case of a turn-out, he must witness, without much power to relieve,—might have overcome a man of firmer nerve than Allen ; but though they distressed, they did not conquer him, convinced as he was that he ought not to evade the choice of the people. His fellow-labourers allowed him a few minutes to collect his thoughts before addressing them, and while he was seemingly arranging the papers before him, they packed themselves and one another closely, in order to leave room for new comers, without creating a noise and bustle. Those who stood nearest the arbour hung the flags so as to make a sort of canopy over it, and a few of the most efficient of the standing Committee took their places on each side of Allen.—His address was in natural accordance with the feelings which had just passed through his mind :—

" Combinations are necessary, my fellow-labourers, when one set of men is opposed to another, as we are to our masters. The law could not prevent combinations, even when severe punishments visited those who were engaged in them ; which was a clear proof that men must combine, that the law was of no use, and ought therefore to be done away. Let me congratulate you that these severe laws are done away ; that a man cannot now be shut up in prison for many months together for agreeing with his companions to withhold their labour in order to increase its price. Let me congratulate you that when a man cannot be caught in the

trap of the combination laws, he can no longer be punished under a law against conspiracy, which was made long before such a thing as combinations of workmen were thought of. We can now meet in the face of day, and conduct our bargains with our masters either by agreement or opposition, without any one having a right to interfere, as long as we keep the peace. Evils there are, indeed, still ; and such a thing is still heard of as persecution in consequence of a combination ; but such evils as are inflicted by the crushing hand of power light on a few, and the devotion of those few secures the exemption of the rest. It is certainly an evil to a peaceably disposed man to see himself regarded with a fierce eye by those to whom he no longer dares touch his hat lest he should be accused of suing for mercy. It is certainly an evil to a man of independent mind to be placed under the feet of any former enemy, to receive his weekly subsistence from the hands of his equals, and to fancy that the whisper is going round—'this is he who lives upon our gathered pence.'—Such evils await, as you know, him who comes forward to lead a combination ; but they belong to the state of affairs ; and since they can neither be helped, nor be allowed to weigh against the advantages of union, they should be, not only patiently, but silently borne. Well is it for the victim if he can say to himself that now is the time for him to practise the heroism which in grander scenes has often made his bosom throb. He may even esteem himself honoured in his lot being some-

what of the same cast,—though his own consciousness alone may perceive the resemblance,—something of the same cast, I say, with that of venerated statesmen who have returned to the plough to be forgotten in their own age, and remembered in another,—with that of generals who have held out the decrepit hand with a petition to the gay passers by to give a halfpenny to the deliverer of their country.—Nay, no cheers yet! Your cheers only recall me with shame to that which I was going to say when my personal feelings led me away,—led me to compare that which is universally allowed to be moving because it is noble, with that which, if moving at all, is so only because it is piteous. As I was saying, combinations are ordered by laws more powerful than those which, till lately, forbade them; and this shows the wisdom of the repeal of the latter. If it had been wished to prevent our meeting for caprice or sport, laws might have availed. If their object had been to hinder the idle from meeting to dissipate their tediousness, or the gamesome from pursuing that on which no more valuable thing was staked than their present pleasure, these laws might have been successfully, though somewhat tyrannically, enforced. But such are not they who form combinations; but rather such as have their frames bowed with over-toil, and their brows knotted with care; such as meet because the lives and health of their families, their personal respectability, and the bare honesty of not stealing a loaf from another man's counter, are the tremendous stake

which they feel to be put to hazard. Sound and wise laws can restrain the fiercest passions of the few, because, being sound and wise, they are supported by the many ; and it is therefore clear that when laws give way like cobwebs before the impulse of a body of men too united to be brought together by caprice, those laws are neither wise nor sound. Such were the combination laws, and therefore were they repealed. Never again will it be attempted to set up the prohibition of parliament against the commands of nature,—a threat of imprisonment against the cravings of hunger. Security of person and property being provided for, (as, indeed, they were already by former laws,) we are left free to make the best agreement we can for the sale of our labour, and to arrange our terms by whatever peaceable methods we choose.

" Combination on our part is necessary from power being lodged unequally in the hands of individuals, and it is necessary for labourers to husband their strength by union, if it is ever to be balanced against the influence and wealth of capitalists. A master can do as he pleases with his hundred or five hundred workmen, unless they are combined. One word of his mouth, one stroke of his pen, can send them home on the Saturday night with a blank prospect of destitution before them ; while these hundred or five hundred men must make their many wills into one before his can even be threatened with opposition. One may tremble, another may mourn, a third may sink deep down in his heart the

curses he dares not proclaim ; but all this is of no avail. The only way is to bring opposition to bear upon the interests of the master ; and this can only be done by union. The best of the masters say, and probably with truth, that their interests demand the reductions under which we groan. Be it so : we have interests too, and we must bring them up as an opposing force, and see which are the strongest. This may be,—allow me to say, must be—done without ill-will in any party towards any other party. There may be some method yet unknown by which the interests of all may be reconciled ; if so, by union we must discover it. But if, indeed, interests must continue to be opposed, if bread must be fought for, and the discord of men must for ever be contrasted with the harmony of nature, let the battle be as fair as circumstances will allow. Let the host of pygmies try if they cannot win a chance against the regiment of giants by organizing their numbers, and knitting them into a phalanx. The odds against them are fearful, it is true ; but more desperate battles have been sustained and won. I have not indeed, as the friend at my elbow reminds me, represented our case so favourably as I might have done. Many here think that the power is in our own hands ; some that the chances are equal, and the least sanguine, that the chance is fair.—I have spoken of the general necessity of union, and not with any intention of taking for granted that we are on the eve of an express struggle. This depends on circumstances yet to be disclosed. Some

change, and that a speedy one, there ought to be in the condition of the working classes : they cannot go on long labouring their lives away for a less recompense than good habitations, clothing, and food. These form the very least sum of the just rewards of industry ; whereas a multitude are pinched with the frosts of winter, live amidst the stench of unwholesome dwellings in summer, have nearly forgotten the taste of animal food, and even sigh for bread as for a luxury. The question to be debated, and to be put to the trial if necessary,—and I wish every master in Manchester was here to take down my words for his further consideration, is whether a social being has not a right to comfortable subsistence in return for his full and efficient labour.”—Allen’s pause was interrupted by a voice from behind the crowd, declaring,—

“ No doubt, no doubt, my good fellows : a clear right, and I wish with all my heart you may win your right.”

It was Rowe, who had entered as if for the purpose of convincing the men that he was on their side. An opening was made from the table to the outskirts of the crowd ; but Rowe slunk back in opposition to all attempts to push him forward. The fact was, he saw another person present whom he little expected to meet, and before whom he was sorry to have committed himself. Mr. Wentworth advanced through the opening, with his memorandum book in his hand :—

“ I am willing to put down your question,

Allen, for further discussion, provided you add a clause to it:—‘ Whether a member of society has not a right to a comfortable subsistence, in return for full and efficient labour, provided he does not, by his own act, put that subsistence beyond his reach?’ ”

Allen smiled, and all within hearing stared at Mr. Wentworth’s simplicity in adding this clause which nobody could dispute.

“ We have certainly nothing to object to your addition, sir,” said Allen. “ Only I cannot think it necessary.”

“ Let it stand, however, for my satisfaction; and now go on with what you have to say.”

A seat was offered to Mr. Wentworth, and proclamation was made of one for Mr. Rowe, who, however, had disappeared. Allen proceeded:—

“ I have only a few words to add respecting the terms on which I will consent to resume my present office on any future occasion, or to accept of any power you may wish to put into my hands. I must be supported by you in all measures taken to preserve our own peace and that of the masters; and to this end, there must be the utmost strictness in the full performance of all contracts. Whether the present dispute be amicably settled this very evening, or whether it be protracted, or a partial or a general strike should take place,—none of these things can set aside a contract previously entered into. Integrity must be our rule as much as liberty is our warrant and justice our end. The first man who deserts the work he

has pledged himself to perform, puts the weapon of the law into the hands of our opponents : the first who is legally convicted of a breach of contract, brands our cause with indelible disgrace. We want no truants here, and we will own none but honest labourers to be of our company ; and unless I am aided in preserving the reputation of our cause, I declare,—whatever may be thought of the importance of the threat,—that from that moment I withdraw my countenance and my help. If at the period of any strike, any part of my contract with my employers is undischarged, I shall hold it to be my duty to work for them during the stated number of hours, even if I should repair from their factory to preside over a meeting like the present ; and the same is expected of every man who enrolls himself in our bands. Honour towards our masters is as necessary as fidelity to each other."

The meeting having signified an unanimous assent to what Allen had said, he proceeded to draw up a statement of wages to be presented to the masters. A great number of men pushed and jostled one another in order to get near the table and state their grievances ; for some under every firm supposed their wages to be the lowest. It was found to be as the deputies had stated, that Mortimer and Rowe paid the lowest wages, and Elliott the highest.—Mortimer and Rowe were therefore to be requested to answer this evening, yes or no, whether they would give Elliott's rate of wages. Allen, Clack, and

Gibson were deputed to wait on the masters with the written demand.

The meeting broke up for a while, and the quietest and most industrious of the men went home, while the rest prepared to parade again through the streets.

Allen withdrew one of the last, as he wished to see the place quiet before he left his post. As he turned from the door of the public-house, his hands in his pockets and his eyes bent on the ground in deep thought, he was startled by some one taking his arm. It was his wife, who had been watching and lingering in the neighbourhood till she was tired and frightened.

"Why, Mary," said her husband, smiling, "you will make me lose my good name. This is the way wives haunt the public-house when their husbands are given to drink."

Mary could trust her husband for soberness if ever woman could; but she feared his being drawn in to join against the masters, and bring ruin on his family.

Allen answered that he was not the man to be *drawn in* to do what his wife knew he disliked as much as she could do: but he might of his own free choice determine to do what she feared; and, in that case, he trusted the discharge of his public duty would not be embittered by domestic opposition and discontent. His prospect was not a very cheering one, however, in this respect. When fairly seated in his own home, his wife seemed prodigiously inclined to lock the door

and pocket the key ; and she cried so pitifully at the bare idea of a strike and its distresses, that Allen longed to go to sleep, and forget all that had been done, and all that was in prospect.

CHAPTER V.

NO PROGRESS MADE.

THE masters' meeting was a tedious affair to all parties. The chairman and the three deputies held such long disputes, as to whether wages were really much lower than formerly, that the people who waited in anxious expectation at the Spread Eagle, began to wonder whether the deputies had lain down to take a nap, or found their business a different kind of affair from what they had expected. If they had known what point was in dispute, they would have wondered what room there was for argument, as any man among them could have told what he was paid two years before, and what now. They all knew that they were now paid by Mortimer and Rowe, only three and fourpence per one thousand hanks, while some time before, they had had upwards of four shillings. How, they would have asked, could there be any doubt as to whether wages were lowered ?

Clack was profuse in his expressions of astonishment at the stupidity of those who made

a question of so plain a matter ; but his wonder did no more towards settling the point than the shuffling of the chairman, who did not understand the true state of the case, and could therefore render no service in throwing light upon it.

" If it had not been for Mr. Wentworth, and one or two more who held his views, nothing at all would have been done.

" Nobody doubts," observed Wentworth, " that you now take so many shillings less than you took five years ago ; but that matters nothing to you or to us."

The chairman and Clack stared in about an equal degree.

" My dear sir, that is the very point," said the one.

" I always thought you had had a heart to feel for the poor," cried the other.

" I beg your pardon," said the gentleman quietly, " it is not, sir, the point in dispute, and I trust, Clack, my observation does not carry any great cruelty in it. If a penny a week would enable a man to buy all necessaries for himself and his family, and if a pound would do no more, would it signify to any man whether his wages were a penny or a pound ?"

" Certainly not ; but who ever heard of such wonderful pennies ?"

" I have heard of shillings which you might think nearly as wonderful as such pennies : shillings which would buy more than twice as much at one time as at another."

" To be sure," said Clack, laughing con-

temptuously, "every child knows that the price of bread and other things rises and falls."

"Very well. Your concern is about how much of bread and other things you get in return for your labour, and not how many shillings. Shillings are of no value to you but for what they buy. If half the money in the kingdom were to be carried off by fairies this night, so that you could have only half your present nominal wages, you would be no worse off than at present. The same quantity of food and clothing would be in the market, and you would get as much for sixpence as you now get for a shilling. This is why I said the nominal amount of your wages mattered little. I said nothing about the real amount."

"But you do not deny, sir," said Allen, "that our real wages are less than they were?"

"I am afraid it is as true as that our profits are less. There is less surplus remaining over our manufacture for us to divide. If this division were made in kind, instead of your being paid in money in advance, you would see the real state of the case,—that we cannot afford higher wages."

"In kind! Lord, sir," cried Clack, "what should we do with a bundle of yarns on a Saturday night? What baker or grocer would take them?"

"None, I dare say; and therefore, for the convenience of the parties, payment for labour is made in money; but it is not the less true that your wages consist of the proportion you receive

of the return brought by the article you manufacture. You know how the value of this return varies ; how, when an article is scarce, it brings in a large return, and how, when it is plentiful, our customers give less for it ; and you must therefore see how your wages vary independently of our will."

"But whose doing is it, sir, that the return varies so much?"

"It is partly your doing ; I mean that of those who bring labour to market. We masters have nothing to do with the quantity of labour brought to sale any further than to purchase it. If you bring so much as to reduce its price too far, whose fault is that?"

"To be sure we cannot expect you to pay high, when you can purchase labour cheap," said Allen, "any more than we would give sixpence for a loaf, if we could get as good a one for fivepence."

"If," observed one of the masters, "you brought only half the present quantity of labour to us, we must, whether we liked it or no, pay double for it. If you choose to bring up large families who will in turn rear large families to the same occupation, it is a necessary consequence that wages will fall to the very lowest point."

"What do you call the lowest point?"

"That at which the labourer can barely subsist. If he cannot subsist, he cannot labour, of course. If he can do more than merely subsist, his wages are not at the lowest point."

"Ours are so, now," said Gibson, despondingly.

"Not exactly so," replied the manufacturer. "Don't fancy that I wish them lower, or would not make them higher if I could; but I cannot allow that they are at the lowest. Do you know no Irish hand-loom weavers who make only four shillings a week?"

"Poor creatures! yes; but how do they live? Crowded together on straw, with mere rags to cover them, and only half as much food as they could eat. It is dreadful!"

"It is; and God forbid we should see many more sinking down into such a state! I only mentioned their case to show you that your wages may still fall, if the labourers' proportion of the returns to capital is still further divided among a number. Upon the proportion of your labour to our capital depends the rise and fall of wages through the whole scale of payment."

"What would you call the highest rate?" inquired Allen.

"The greatest possible proportion of the return that the capitalist can spare, so as leave it worth his while to manufacture; and this highest rate is, of course, paid only when labour is difficult to be had."

"We cannot wait till that time," said Clark. "If we waited till a war or a fever carried off part of our numbers, it would do little good; for there are plenty of young ones growing up. We must bestir ourselves and see if a strike will not do as well. The plague would no doubt be more

acceptable to gentlemen, as long as it did not stop their manufacture, like a strike; but the poor must raise themselves by such means as are in their own hands, and not wait for a judgment of Providence."

"I quite agree with you," said Mr. Wentworth. "Providence would have men guide themselves by its usual course, and not by uncommon accidents. But I doubt whether a strike is one of the means which will gain your point. It will leave your case worse than in the beginning, depend upon it. A strike works the wrong way for your interest. It does not decrease, your numbers, and it does decrease the capital which is to maintain you."

Clack would hear nothing against a strike. Let the masters all give the same wages as Elliott, or prepare for a strike. Rather to silence the orator than with hope of much benefit from the observation, Gibson said that a pernicious multiplication of hands took place from the big piecers being allowed to spin. The masters for the most part liked that they should, because they soon get to employ them to spin at less wages; and too many of the men liked it, also, because it saved them trouble: and some would even sit down to read, while their piecers were looking after the wheels; but it seemed to him very hard that good spinners should be sometimes out of work, while piecers were practising their business.

The masters thought that any regulation of the kind Gibson wished for, would only have a slight effect for a short time; it could not permanently

keep down the splitting population to the number required to ensure sufficient wages.

Clack would not be diverted any longer from the plain answer to his plain question, "Would Messrs. Mortimer and Rowe raise their wages to Elliott's rate ?" Rowe took a long pinch of snuff to avoid answering. Mortimer sat bolt upright with his arms folded, and replied, "Certainly not." Not a word more could be got out of him. Others of the masters tried to mediate, proposing that Elliot and Mortimer should meet half-way, that is, at Mr. Wentworth's rate ; but this proposal was rejected by all parties." Elliott said he left these things to the people under him ; but he believed his clerk was popular with the operatives, and wished for no change any more than himself ; so that he should not reduce. Mortimer would not be dictated to by a mob ; and the representatives of this 'mob' declared their intention of calling Wentworth to account, when they had done with Mortimer, and that his rate must not therefore be proposed for adoption." And thus the matter was no nearer being settled than before.

"Pray is it true," inquired Mortimer, "that you have talked of rooting me out ?"

"Such a thing has been mentioned in private, sir," replied Allen, "but immediately scouted. It was never proposed at any public meeting, and will not be mentioned again, I dare say."

"No ! you have more prudence than I gave you credit for. I almost wish you had made the trial, that you might learn by learning your own

place. You would soon have known what comes of dictating to us."

This was a signal for Clack to renew his oratory. The peace-makers on both sides found it was time to separate, as there seemed no chance of coming to any agreement. The three men made their bow and withdrew,—Allen with a heavy heart, leaving the masters to agree that the affair must be gone through with firmness and temper; that is, some were for firmness, and some for temper. Mortimer was annoyed at being exposed to annoyance from people so much beneath him; and Wentworth and others thought that the shortest way to a good issue was to regard the claims of the people with respect, their mistakes with gentleness, and their distresses with compassion.

Before Allen could speak a word in reply to the inquiries of his eager companions, Clack began in a strain of indignation to pronounce him a trimmer, for having answered Mortimer as he did about the proposal to root him out. The men being disposed at the moment to listen to everything that regarded the punishment of Mortimer, were hard upon Allen, though not so abusive as Clack. Allen kept his temper, stood the brunt of that to which his rectitude of principle exposed him, stayed till the business of the evening was finished, and then pondered, on his way home, the hard chance by which he was exposed to the displeasure of the masters, the unreasonableness of his comrades, and the timid complaints of his wife. Allen was not made for ambition.

Before the operatives separated, it was agreed that all employed at a lower rate of wages than Elliott's should turn out the next morning, except the children, whose maintenance would cost so much that it was desirable they should earn as long as allowed to do so. Meetings were to be held from day to day, first to appoint a fresh committee, and afterwards to take measures for securing assistance from fellow-labourers at a distance.

Bray, who had taken care that the meeting should not want for harmony of one kind at least during its sitting, betook himself at its close to the York Hotel, just when the masters were dispersing, and with some degree of impudence stated his desire to be impartial, and his readiness to drum the gentlemen home, if they would please to marshal themselves, as he had played in front of the men in the morning. Elliott called for a waiter to turn the fellow away, and Wentworth observed that he feared his travels had not improved the quality of his wit.

CHAPTER VI.

NIGHT AND MORNING.

"How is Martha?" was Allen's first inquiry on meeting his wife at the head of the stairs. Martha had been asleep when he had returned in

the middle of the day; for it was now her turn for night-work at the factory, and what rest she had, must be taken in the day. Her mother said that her lameness was much the same; that she had seen Mr. Dawson, the apothecary, who pronounced that rest was what her weak limbs most required; and that as perfect rest was out of the question, her mother must bandage the joints while the child was at her work, and keep her laid on her bed at home. Here was the difficulty, her mother said, especially while Hannah was with her, for they were both fond of play when poor Martha was not too tired to stir. She was now gone to her work for the night.

The little girl repaired to the factory, sighing at the thought of the long hours that must pass before she could sit down or breathe the fresh air again. She had been as willing a child at her work as could be, till lately; but since she had grown sickly, a sense of hardship had come over her, and she was seldom happy. She was very industrious, and disposed to be silent at her occupation; so that she was liked by her employers, and had nothing more to complain of than the necessary fatigue and disagreeableness of the work. She would not have minded it for a few hours of the day; but to be shut up all day, or else all night, without any time to nurse the baby or play with her companions, was too much for a little girl of eight years old. She had never been so sensible of this as since her renewed acquaintance with Hannah. This night, when the dust from the cotton made

her cough, when the smell and the heat brought on sickness and faintness, and the incessant whizzing and whirling of the wheels gave her the feeling of being in a dream, she remembered that a part of Hannah's business was to walk on broad roads or through green fields by her father's side, listening to the stories he amused her with, and to sit on a stile or under a tree to practice a new tune, or get a better dinner than poor Martha often saw. She forgot that Hannah was sometimes wet through, or scorched by the sun, as her complexion, brown as a gipsy's, showed ; and that Hannah had no home and no mother, and very hard and unpleasant work to do at fairs, and on particular occasions. About midnight, when Martha remembered that all at home were probably sound asleep, she could not resist the temptation of resting her aching limbs, and sat down, trusting to make up afterwards for lost time, and taking care to be on her feet when the overlooker passed, or when any one else was likely to watch her. It is a dangerous thing, however, to take rest with the intention of rousing oneself from time to time ; and so Martha found. She fairly fell asleep after a time, and dreamed that she was attending very diligently to her work ; and so many things besides passed through her mind during the two minutes that she slept, that when the overlooker laid his hand upon her shoulder, she started and was afraid she was going to be scolded for a long fit of idleness. But she was not harshly spoken to.

"Come, come, child ; how long have you been asleep ?"

"I don't know. I thought I was awake all the time." And Martha began to cry.

"Well, don't cry. I was past just now, and you were busy enough; but don't sit down; better not, for fear you should drop asleep again."

Martha thought she had escaped very well; and winking and rubbing her eyes, she began to limp forwards and use her trembling hands. The overseer watched her for a few moments, and told her she was so industrious in general that he should be sorry to be hard upon her; but she knew that if she was seen flagging over her work, the idle ones would make it an excuse to do so too. Martha curtsied, and put new vigour into her work at this praise. Before he went on in his rounds, the overseer pointed to the window and told her morning was come.

It was a strange scene that the dawn shone upon. As the grey light from the east mingled with the flickering, yellow glare of the lamps, it gave a mottled, dirty appearance to every thing; to the pale-faced children, to the unshaved overseer, to the loaded atmosphere, and even to the produce of the wheels.

When a bright sunbeam shone in through the window, thickened with the condensed breath of the work-people, and showed the oily steam rising through the heated room, the lamps were extinguished, to the great relief of those who found the place growing too like an oven to be much longer tolerable. The sunbeams rested now on

the ceiling, and Martha knew that they must travel down to the floor and be turned full on her frame and some way past it, before she could be released ; but still it was a comfort that morning was come.

She observed that the overseer frequently went out and came back again, and that there was a great deal of consultation among her betters as the hours drew on. A breath of fresh air came in now and then from below, and news went round that the gates were already open, two hours earlier than usual. Presently the tramp of heavy feet was heard, like that of the weavers and spinners coming to their daily work. Martha looked up eagerly to the clock, supposing that the time had passed quicker than she had been aware of ; but it was only four o'clock. What could bring the people to their work so early ? They could scarcely have mistaken the hour from the brightness of the morning, for it had now clouded over, and was raining a soaking shower. More news went round. Those who had arrived had barely escaped being waylaid and punished for coming to work after a strike had been proclaimed. They had been pursued to the gates and very nearly caught, and must now stay where they were till nightfall, as they could not safely appear in broad daylight, going to and returning from their dinners. Many wondered that they had ventured at all, and all prophesied that they must give up to the will of the Union if they wished to be safe. The overseer, finding much excitement prevailing on the

circulation of the news, commanded silence, observing that it was no concern of any of the children present. There was no strike of the children, and they would be permitted to go and come without hinderance. Martha determined to get away the first moment she could, and to meet her father, if possible, that he might not encounter any troublesome people for her sake.

Allen was watching the moment of release as anxiously for his little daughter as she could have done for herself, and he was to the full as weary as she. On the previous evening he had carried home paper and pens, preferring to write the necessary letters at his own dwelling to spending the night at the Spread Eagle. He got his wife to clear and wipe down the deal table, when she had put all the children to bed; and then he sat down to compose a pattern letter, stating the circumstances which had led to a strike, and urging an appeal to their fellow-workmen in distant places for aid in the struggle which might be deemed a peculiarly important one. Having tolerably well satisfied himself that the letter was the proper thing, he read it to his admiring wife, who by turns smiled because she was proud of her husband, and sighed to think how perilous an office he had undertaken. She then went to bed and was soothed to sleep by the scratching of his nicely-mended pen. From this time all was silence in the apartment, except the occasional crackle when Allen folded his paper, or the cautious taking up and laying down of the snuffers when the long candle-wick

craved snuffing, or the passing squalls of the baby who, however, allowed himself to be so quickly hushed as not materially to disturb the scribe.

When nearly twenty copies of his letter had been written; each varying a little from the original, according to the differing circumstances of those to whom it was addressed, Allen was so weary that he could write no longer without some refreshment. He put out his light, and opened the window for a minute to breathe the fresh air. The pattering of the rain wakened his wife, who roused herself to fret over the weather and wonder how Martha was to get home. Her husband told her he meant to go for the child, and would carry a shawl to wrap her up in. If Mary had known what lions were in her husband's path, she would not have let him go.

There was but one man visible when Allen went forth, and he was walking rapidly at some distance. It was Hare,—who, having never been well disposed towards a turn-out, and being supported in his dislike of it by his wife, hoped to avoid mischief and continue his earnings by going to the factory before people should be looking for him, and doing his work as usual, without talking about wages to anybody. Such devices did not suit the purposes of the Union, and were guarded against, as in all similar cases. Hare thought it just possible that he might meet with opposition, and looked as far before him as his eyes could reach ; but he did not suspect an ambush on either hand. When he continued in

the same direction, however, so as to render it certain that he was making for the factory, six men issued, one by one, from opposite alleys, and formed a line across the street. Hare's name was shouted to some one still concealed, coupled with a question whether he was under contract.

Having received their answer, they coolly told their trembling fellow-workman that as he had not the pretence of any contract, and was nevertheless going to work at an unfair price, he must be ducked. They had a rope ready, and would deliver him up to be dragged through the river.

Hare turned from one to another with as large a variety of excuses as he could invent at the moment. Among the rest, he vowed that he came to watch who would be wicked enough to go to work at this same factory after having sworn to strike. He was laughed at, let off with a roll in the kennel and with being hunted part of the way home, whither he ran to seek refuge with his wife in panting terror, and presenting a weeful spectacle of disgrace. He perhaps owed it to his known cowardice that he fared no worse; as his companions were well assured he was sufficiently daunted not to attempt to cheat them a second time.

Allen proceeded at his best pace while this judgment was being inflicted on Hare, never supposing that he could be suspected of taking work unfairly; but, like all eminent men, he had his enemies, and these chose to take for granted that he could not be going to the factory with any honest design. He was seized, girded with

the dreadful rope, and hauled towards the river; though he produced the shawl, demanded time to call witnesses, and used all the eloquence he could command. His last resource was to explain that the supplies from a distance must be delayed if any harm happened to him. This occasioned a short pause, during which the night-children came forth from the factory. One of the ambush, who had some sense of justice, and wished to find out the truth about Allen, ran up to Martha, as soon as she appeared, and before she could know what had happened, and asked her whether her father was not late in coming to work this morning?

"He is not coming to work at all," said the child; "but he said he would come for me. Perhaps the rain made him stay at home."

This testimony released Allen, and disappointed some of the lads who stood round of a frolic, which they had desired to fill up the time till they could proceed to a frolic of a different kind. They looked up at the clouds, and hoped the rain would not make the parson cheat them. They were going to be married. Several had begun to think of this some time before (as lads and lasses that work together in factories are wont to do); and this seemed the very time, when they had a holiday they did not know what to do with, and were sure, they believed, of ten shillings a week as long as the turn-out should last. So, amid the warning looks of elderly friends, and the remonstrances of parents who justly thought this the worst possible time to

take new burdens upon them, several thoughtless young couples went laughing through the rain to the altar, and snapped their fingers at the clergyman behind his back because his careful enquiries brought to light no cause why the solemnization of matrimony should not proceed.

CHAPTER VII.

A COMMITTEE.

THIS was an eventful day. The masters published a placard, (not, however, signed by all,) threatening to turn off every man in their employ who should continue, after a certain day, to belong to the Union. The effect was exactly what the wisest of them expected; the turn-out became general; and the workmen, being exasperated, put new vigour into all their proceedings. Their Committee was enlarged and instructed to sit daily. Delegates were despatched on tours to distant places, with authority to tell the tale, and collect supplies; and the people at home consented to receive, for their weekly maintenance, no more than half what the young bridegrooms had settled as the probable allowance. Five shillings a week was to be allowed as long as the children remained at work; and in case of their employment failing, the sum was to be in-

creased in proportion to the capability of the fund. Weekly meetings were ordered to be held in St. George's Fields, at which any one should be welcome to attend ; and it was agreed that it would be worth while going to some expense to have the proceedings of the body made public through the newspapers.

Allen was strongly in favour of having only three members of the Committee sit daily for the dispatch of common business ; viz., the treasurer, secretary, and one of the other members, in rotation, for the sake of a casting vote. He knew enough of such Committees to believe that ill-natured tittle-tattle was particularly apt to find its way into them, and that quarrels between masters and men were often kept up by these means long after they would naturally have died out ; and that a weekly sitting, at which the three members should be accountable for all they had done, would be sufficient for the interests of the association. The proposal gave offence, however ; some supposing that he wanted to keep the power in few hands, others being unwilling to enjoy the pomp and privilege of their office no oftener than once or twice a week, and some honestly thinking that the voices of all were wanted for the decision of questions daily arising. Allen would have cared little for his motion being rejected ; but, in spite of all the allowance he strove to make, it vexed him to the heart to hear evil motives assigned for every proposition which did not please the people. He often said to himself that it must be a very dif-

ferent thing to sit in a committee of gentlemen where opinions are treated as opinions, (*i. e.*, as having no moral qualities, and to be accepted or rejected according to their expediency,) and in a committee of persons who expose their deficiencies of education by calling all unkind or foolish who differ from themselves. Such remarks appeared to Allen to proceed from the same spirit which tortured martyrs in former days, and proscribed the leaders of a combination in the present.

Any one committee-meeting afforded a pretty fair specimen of all. Sometimes there were more letters than at others, sometimes larger, sometimes smaller remittances than had been expected, and occasionally none at all. Sometimes there was a dearth of gossip about the sayings and doings of the masters, and then again an abundance of news of spiteful devices and wilful misrepresentations and scornful sayings, for which there should be a sure retribution. But the same features distinguished all; and one sketch will therefore describe the whole.

A little before ten, the committee-men might be seen tending towards St. George's road. They could win their way but slowly, for they were continually waylaid by one or another who had some very important suggestion to make, or question to answer; or a piece of news to tell which would sound well in committee. Allen was the most sore beset.

"Lord! Allen, what work yours must be with such a many letters to write! Why, it must cost a mint of money to pay postage."

" All for the cause, you know. Let me go, will you ? I am rather late."

" Not a clock has struck yet, man, and I want to know whether it's true about the large order that's gone to Glasgow because Elliott can't execute it."

" All true, perfectly true. Good bye."

" Well, but have you seen Elliott since ? Lord ! I should love to see him look chap-fallen when he finds the power is with us."

" 'Tis for us to look chop-fallen, I think," said Allen, trying to disengage his button ; " where's the power if more such orders go the same way ? "

" Stop, Allen, one thing more. Do you know, several of us are of a mind that it is a disgrace to the Union that Wooller, with his large family, has no more on a pay-day than Briggs."

" Briggs has a sick wife, and his children are too young to work."

" Wooller must have more, however, and that you'll find to your cost, if you don't take care. Pretty encouragement to turn out, indeed, if such a man as he is to be sacrificed to worse men than himself !"

" Let him carry his complaint to the proper place, if he is discontented. The committee ordered his allowance, and it is they must alter it, not I."

Allen now thought he had made his escape ; but his gossip called after him that he had something to tell him on which the whole fate of the strike depended. Allen was all ear in a moment. It was said, and on very good authority, that the

masters would never employ a Manchester man again. They had sent to Glasgow and to Belfast, and all over England, and if they could not get workmen enough by these means, they would bring them in troops from abroad.

"Who told you this?" said Allen, laughing.

"That's between him and me," replied the gossip mysteriously; "but you may rely upon it, it is true."

"Aye, we have been told so twice a day since we turned out," said Allen; "but that is no reason why we should believe it. You might as well tell me they mean to take their mills on their backs and march over the sea to America."

"You may laugh, sir, but I'm far from as sure as you that we are not going to ruin."

"I am sure of no such thing," replied Allen. "I wish I were: but if we are ruined, it will not be by French people spinning in Chorlton Row."

A knot of smokers, each with as much to say, stood or lolled about the door of the Spread-Eagle. Allen looked at the window of the committee-room, and wished he could have got in that way; but there was no escape from the file of questioners. Several of his companions were ready to tell him that he was late, when he at length took his seat at the end of the table, and began to arrange his papers.

"I know it; but I left home half an hour since. I have been stopped by the way."

"And so you always will be. You're so soft, man, you're not fit for office if you can't say 'no,'"

Dooley, the representative of the Irish hand-loom weavers, here took up Alien's defence, urging that it would be too hard if the people out of office might not make their remarks to those who were in; and that a secretary must be as stony-hearted as the last speaker to refuse them a hearing.

"Come, come; to business," cried Allen, to stop the dispute. "But first shut the door, Brown, and make every one knock that wants to come in. If they won't obey at once, slip the bolt. We must preserve the dignity and quiet of the Committee."

"O, by all manner of means," said the Irishman, sitting down demurely at the board, and twirling his thumbs; "it puts me in mind of the way his honour set us to play when we were children—."

"I have here a letter from number three," Allen began, as if all had been silence, "who has prosecuted his journey successfully as far as Halifax, from whence he hopes to transmit, in a post or two, a sum nearly as large as was contributed by that place to the Bradford strike. It will gratify you, I am sure, to know with how much friendly anxiety our fellow-labourers watch the result of our present noble struggle; and I trust you will agree with me that their suggestions are entitled to our respectful attention. Dooley, be so good as read the letter to the Committee, while I look what must be brought forward next."

"With real pleasure, Mr. Secretary; but first

I'll take lave to wet my throat with a little ale or spirits. It's dry work reading and advising, and a clear sin to keep so many men shut up on a summer's day with not a drop to help their wits."

"Whatever is ordered is at your own cost, remember," said Allen; "and I would recommend your going elsewhere to refresh yourself. Meanwhile, will some one else have the goodness to read the letter now under consideration?"

After much complaint and discussion, Dooley was prevailed on to be quiet and let the business go forward. Having first loaded Allen with abuse and then with praise, he tried to behave well, much in the same way as if his priest had put him under penance.

The letter in question and some others having been discussed and dismissed with due decorum, a member brought before the notice of his fellow-workmen a calumny which he believed had been widely circulated, and which was likely to impair the credit of the association, and thus to deprive them of the countenance of their distant friends and of all chance of reconciliation with the masters. It was said and believed—

A push at the door. "Who is there?"

"Only Tom Hammond."

"Learn what he wants."

Tom Hammond only thought he would look in and see whether it was a full committee-day, and how they got on: which thought only occasioned the door to be shut in his face, and the delivery of an admonition to go about his own

business and leave other people to manage theirs in quiet.

" Well ; what was this libel ?"

It was said that the Committee had taken upon themselves to go round as inspectors, and to examine the work done by all members of the Union, and determine whether the price given for it was fair or not. Allen thought it incredible that any of the masters could have given heed to so absurd a report : but if one instance could be brought of its having been actually believed, he would be the first to propose some measure of effectual contradiction.

Clack could wish that the secretary was somewhat less inclined to make light of the information brought to the committee by some who were as likely to know what was going forward as himself. The association was not to lose its character because its secretary chose to laugh at the foul calumnies circulated against it, and which seemed any thing but laughable to those who had the honour of the Union really at heart. And so forth.

The secretary begged to explain that nothing was further from his intention than to risk the good name of the association ; and he must further assert that no man breathing had its honour more at heart than himself. He need but appeal to those who had heard him say but just now —. And so forth.

The result was a resolution that a paper should be drawn up and presented to the masters, containing an explanation of what the office of this

committee consisted in ; *viz.* :—not in determining the value of work and the rate of wages, but in managing the affairs of the turn-out after the strike had been actually made ;—in collecting and distributing money, and conducting the correspondence and accounts.

While Allen was consulting his companions about the wording of this letter, the rub-a-dub of a drum, accompanying shrill piping, was heard approaching from a distance, and presently the sounds of merriment from without told that Bray was among the smokers on the outside. Sometimes a rumble and screech seemed to show that the unskilful were trying his instruments, and then it appeared from the heavy tread and shuffling of feet that some were dancing horn-pipes under his instructions. Dooley soon started up.

“ Let us have Bray in here. He’ll put a little life in us, for all this is as dull as sitting at a loom all day. We make it a point of honour, you know, not to trample on a fallen man. We let Bray come and go as if he was still one of us, poor cratur.”

“ Wait till he comes,” said Allen. “ He is thinking no more of us at this moment than we need think of him.”

Dooley returned to his seat with the mock face of a chidden child, and walking as softly as if he trod on eggs, twirling his thumbs as before. He had not long to wait for his diversion. Bray suddenly made a lodgment in the window, sitting astride on the sill with his drum balanced

before him and playing with all his might, so as almost to deafen those within. When he saw the vexed countenances of two or three of the men of business, he ceased, dropped into the room, rolled his drum into a corner, flung his belled cap behind it, and said,—

“Don’t scold me, pray. I’ll make it all up to you. I’ll have bars put up at the windows at my own cost to prevent any more idle fellows dropping in upon you when you have made all safe at the door. Moreover, I will give you the benefit of my best wisdom at this present time. What’s the matter in hand?”

The Committee found their advantage in the consideration which made them admit Bray to their councils, though he had no longer any connexion with their affairs. His natural shrewdness and travelled wisdom were valuable helps upon occasion. When the terms of the disclaimer were agreed upon, Bray told them he had something of importance to say, and he should say it out as plainly as he had heard it, since he hoped they were all men, all possessed of resolution enough to bear what might be said of them, and to surrender their own gratification for the public good.

Clack was the first to give a vehement assent. With his hand on his heart, he protested that he would take his heart in his hand and give it to be toasted at the hangman’s fire, if it would do the cause any good. All with different degrees of warmth declared their readiness to sacrifice or to be sacrificed. Allen’s assent was given the

last and the least confidently, though without hesitation. He had inwardly flinched on first hearing Bray's portentous words, but the recollection that he had already devoted himself, restored his firmness and prepared him for whatever might be coming. He would have flinched no more, even had Bray's story concerned himself instead of another.

"I have been a pretty long round this morning," said Bray, "and among other places to Middleton, and there some good fellows and I had a pot of ale. Who should come in there but a traveller who deals, I am told, with several firms in this place. Well: he heard us talking about the strike, and not liking, seemingly, to overhear without speaking, like a spy, he joined in with us, and talked like a very sensible man,—more so than I should have expected, considering how much he has clearly been with the masters."

"You never miss a stroke at your old enemies, Bray."

"As long as they are enemies to me and such as me, I shall give them a hit at every turn. Well, this gentleman told us that he could speak to the dispositions of the masters, if any one could; and he was positive that if the men would take one step, they would soon have overtures from the masters. 'If,' said he, 'they will prevent Clack from having anything to do with their strike, the masters will begin to come round from that moment.'"

"Turn *me* out!" exclaimed Clack. "Prevent *my* having anything to do——"

Bray pursued as if Clack were a hundred miles off. "They think that fellow," says he, "a vulgar speechifier that knows nothing about the matter in dispute, and is only fit to delude the more ignorant among the spinners and to libel the masters. Send him back into the crowd where his proper place is, and then you will see what the masters have to say to the Committee."

Allen endeavoured to stop remarks which it must be painful enough to Clack to hear under any form, and which were made needlessly offensive by Bray, who was rather glad of the opportunity of giving a set down to the mischief-maker. Clack was necessarily soon stopped also by general consent. He raged and vowed revenge in such a style that it was plainly right to dismiss him now if it had not been so before. He could no longer be trusted with any degree of power against the masters, if the Committee wished to preserve their character for impartiality. As soon as he could be persuaded to leave the room to have his case considered, it was agreed to recommend him to resign, if he wished to avoid being regularly deposed at the next public meeting. He preferred the appeal to the public; and his companions could only hope that the masters would hear of what had passed, and would take the will for the deed.

It was next proposed by a member of the Committee that a sum of money should be presented to Allen in consideration of his services; and he had the pain of hearing himself lauded at

the expense of Clack, according to what seemed the general rule, to admire one man in proportion to the contempt with which another was treated. If Rowe was railed at, Wentworth was praised; if Clack was complained of, Allen was immediately extolled. Being aware of this, Allen would have declined the gift, if for no other reason than that a fit of generosity might be transient: but he had other reasons for refusing to listen to all mention of a gift. He chose to keep his disinterestedness beyond all question; and he feared that the funds were about to decline on the whole, though liberal contributions were looked for from particular places.

To stop further argument, which he intended should be unavailing, he returned brief thanks to his companions and broke up the Committee.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TETE-A-TETE.

It was the policy of the Committee to hold the public meetings of the workmen on pay-days, in order that they might appear on the green refreshed and in good spirits, and thus give the masters the most favourable impression possible of their resources and of the vigour with which they meant to maintain the strike. This arrangement had not the effect of raising the

spirits of the leaders. Pay-day was an anxious and painful day to them. In addition to all the sad stories of distress which they must hear, and the discontent which they must witness, there was a perpetual dread of the fund appearing to decline, and of the confidence of the people being therefore shaken. It was frequently necessary to borrow money,—sometimes as much as a hundred pounds at a time,—on the security of what was to come in during the next week ; and even those least disposed to foresight could not help asking themselves and each other what was to be done next time, if the remittances of the week should not superabound.

Allen was turning these things over in his mind as he proceeded to the Spread-Eagle on the morning of the day when Clack was expected to be dismissed from the Committee by the public voice. News was afloat which did not tend to cheer his spirits, though he thought he discerned in it a sign that the measures already taken concerning Clack were prudent. Ann Howlett, Clack's betrothed, had been taken up on a charge of breach of contract, and had been committed to prison by the magistrate. This woman having been singled out as an example seemed to indicate enmity against Clack ; and if it was indeed necessary to propitiate the masters by sacrificing him, it was well that the sacrifice was offered by the Committee before the arrest of the woman, instead of in consequence of it. A more painful piece of intelligence followed. Immediately after this arrest, a carrier, who was

conveying work into the country for Mortimer and Rowe, was attacked on his way out of the town, his cart ransacked, himself beaten, and the work carried off in triumph. Ten or twelve men had been concerned in the outrage ; and it was acknowledged that they belonged to the Union ; but Allen in vain attempted to learn who they were. His integrity was so well known, that it was understood that he would deliver the offenders up to justice, be they who they might ; and therefore, though many knew, no one would tell. Mute signs and obscure hints conveyed that Clack headed the enterprise ; but nothing in the shape of evidence was offered.

Mr. Rowe was standing at his window when Allen's gossips left him to pursue his way. The gentleman threw up the sash, looked cautiously up and down the street to ascertain whether he was observed, and then mysteriously beckoned to Allen to come into the house.

"What do you want with me, sir?"

"I want a little conversation with you, that's all. Can't you come in for a quarter of an hour?"

"If I could find any one to take my place at the board," replied Allen, who thought that some overture might be coming. "If you will let me step to the Spread-Eagle or write a note, I am at your service."

The plan of writing a note was preferred, on condition that Allen should not say whence or why he wrote. He saw that the gentleman glanced over his shoulder, to see whether he kept

his word, and turning sharp round, held up the paper in Rowe's face, saying,

"There is honour on the part of us men, I assure you, sir, whatever suspicion there is on the part of you gentlemen. Read the note, if you please."

Rowe did as he was desired, disclaiming suspicion, of course, and getting entangled in a complimentary speech which Allen listened to very quietly, waiting with his arms by his side, for the end of it.

As an ending did not come readily, however, the gentleman broke off in order to send the note. He gave a penny to a child in the street to carry the note to the Spread-Eagle, and run away directly without saying where he came from; and then returning, made Allen sit down and take a glass of ale,—particularly fine ale,—such capital ale that the gentleman often indulged himself in a draught with a friend.

When nothing more remained to be said about ale, Mr. Rowe sighed, and observed what a pity it was that people should fall out to their mutual injury, and that those who had power to reconcile differences should not endeavour to do so.

Allen asked what party was meant by this description.

"You," replied Rowe, shaking him warmly by the hand. "You must know, Allen, that you can do what you please in the Union; and I only wish you knew how the masters look up to you, and respect your manly, moderate con-

duct. Any proposition from you would meet with attention from both parties; if you would _____."

"I beg pardon, sir; but you forget that my propositions are before the masters already, and do not meet with attention. My propositions are those adopted by the Union—"

"Yes, yes; I know well enough what they are; but you must bring forward something new. Is there nothing else you can propose that we can support without going from our word?"

"Just tell me plainly," said Allen, "since you seem to like plain speaking: will you yourself make a concession about raising the wages to a middle point, if we yield some of our demands of equal importance?"

"Why, you see," replied Rowe, edging his chair closer, and filling Allen's glass, "I don't want to come forward the first in this kind of thing. Indeed, as a junior partner, I ought not so to commit myself. I can't be the first, you see; but I have no objection to be the second. Yes, you may, between you and me, depend upon my being the second."

"Between you and me!" exclaimed Allen, laughing. "That leaves me nothing to propose to the meeting. See now how they would laugh at me!—'My fellow-workmen, I propose that we should lower our demands because a person (I am not at liberty to say who) offers, between himself and me, to yield in part after others have yielded.' Why, sir, they would jeer me off the

stand, or bid me say to their concealed opponent, ' Thank you for nothing. If others have yielded first, we shall owe nothing to you.' "

" Well but, Allen, you don't seem to me to know the difficulty I am in, if you use my name. You don't know how unpleasant—"

" Pardon me, sir, I do know. You and I are neither of us men of nerve, Mr. Rowe, and so far, you have chosen your listener well. Clack would have laughed in your face, by this time, and been half way to the Spread-Eagle to tell the people there all that you have been saying; but I have so far a sympathy with you that I know the misery of looking round and seeing entanglement with one party or another on every side—blame from one or another sure to come. I know the longing to be somehow out of the scrape, the shrinking back with the hope of keeping out of sight, the dread of every one that comes near lest some new difficulty should be arising. I can pity you, sir, for all these feelings, for I have felt them myself."

" Have you? have you indeed?" replied Rowe, grasping his hand again. " What a sad thing it is for you, then, to be a leader of a turn-out."

" I am of a different opinion, sir. Because these feelings are natural to some persons, it does not follow that they should be indulged. It will not do to indulge them, sir, believe me. We have our duties as well as men of our make on the field of battle; and we must surrender ourselves, like them, to our duties, or be dis-

graced in our own eyes. Happen what will, within us or without us, it is for you and me to speak out, to act openly, and bear the consequences. You will excuse my freedom."

Another grasp of the hand, with a speech about the secretary's integrity: upon which Allen rose, saying,—

"Then as we are of one mind, sir, suppose we go together to the meeting, and say what we have to say there, instead of shut up in this parlour. I believe I can promise you a courteous hearing."

"O no, no; that is quite out of the question. I have no offer, you know, to make on behalf of the masters,—nothing to say that I should think of occupying the meeting with."

"Then you can have nothing to say to me, sir, since, as an individual, I have no power to negotiate. Good morning, Mr. Rowe."

"Stay a moment, Allen. You understand that the men are not to know of this interview; and it is of more importance still that the masters should not. Promise me, Allen."

"I can promise no such thing," said Allen, returning from the door. "I regard your consent to be the second to raise wages as a concession, and I was going to report it to Mr. Wentworth."

"For God's sake don't!"

"I must," said Allen, firmly; and all entreaty, all reproach, was in vain.

"At least, don't give up the name. The fact will do just as well without the name. Give me

your word to conceal the name till you see me again."

Out of pure compassion, Allen yielded thus far. Mr. Rowe accompanied him to the house-door, harping upon "the name, the name," till Allen turned round to say gravely,

"A promise once given is enough, sir, between honest men. I have given you my word."

"True, true, my good friend. It is only a trick I have got of repeating my sentences."

And the gentleman shut the door behind his guest, feeling very like a child who has persuaded her maid not to tell her governess who broke the china cup; knowing all the time that the mishap must come to light, and trembling every time any one goes near the cupboard.

CHAPTER IX.

A PUBLIC MEETING.

"How much did you fall short to-day?" inquired Allen, as he joined in with a group of committee-men going to the meeting.

"Sixty pounds; but we shall make it up before three days are over, depend upon it; and, besides, the masters will yield as soon as Clack is done for, you'll see. Wentworth is before us, going to the meeting. But what have you been about, Allen, playing truant on pay-day?"

"Preaching fortitude and giving a fillip to the faint-hearted."

"As Christian a duty as feeding the hungry and easing the poor," observed a companion. "If Allen is absent from a good deed, you may be sure he is doing a better."

There was no part of Allen's duty that he disliked more than opening the weekly meetings. The applause discomposed him. He could not, like Clack, make a deprecating flourish of the hands, or shake his head modestly, or look round with a proud smile. He was very apt to fidget, and swing his hat, and make a short ungraceful bow. As soon as he found this out, he adopted one posture, from which he determined not to move till the thing was over. He folded his arms and drooped his head upon his breast, and so stood as if facing a gust of wind, till the clapping had sunk into silence.—This day, the clapping on his appearance was twice as long and twice as vehement as usual, Clack's former popularity being transferred to himself. Mr. Wentworth appeared in time to share his honours, and to relieve him from applause, which seemed as if it would never end. Clack would fain have appropriated both series of cheers; but he could not manage it. As soon as he began to bow and look flattered, there arose cries of "Off, off!" which strengthened into groans when he attempted to brave them. With a nervous sneer, the orator observed to those within hearing that his time would soon come, when he would carry off more cheers than any of them.

"Better put yourself under Allen's wing, if you want to be clapped," observed Mr. Went-

worth. "I conclude it was because I stood next to him that they cheered me to-day, instead of groaning, as they did a week ago. We must submit to be beholden to Allen—hey, Clack?"

With a look of ineffable contempt, the orator withdrew as far as he could from Allen, without going out of sight, while Mr. Wentworth sat down to take a pinch of snuff on the edge of the waggon in which the speakers were stationed.

The object of the meeting was to obtain the opinions of the people on certain questions to be proposed; and, in order to put Clack out of the pain of suspense, his affair was the first brought on. Allen expressed himself in the most moderate terms he could devise, saying that it sometimes happened that the usefulness of an individual was not in proportion to his zeal in the cause he had espoused, or to his desire to fulfil its duties, especially where the likings of two opposite parties had to be consulted; that it so happened in the present case, that the individual in question did not possess the confidence of the masters, and that his remaining a member of the Committee might therefore prove an obstacle in the way of an amicable agreement. It was for the meeting to declare whether they were willing to take the chance of an accommodation by naming some substitute for Clack, who might be equally energetic in their service, and more agreeable to their employers. After a pause, and with evident effort, he added, that if the conduct of the person in question had been, in all respects, such as the Union could approve, it would have

gone hard with the committee before they would have sanctioned his removal from office ; but, as it seemed too evident that the cause had received injury by his means in ways which he might be spared the pain of pointing out, they might consider themselves relieved from the perplexity of reconciling consideration for the individual with a regard to the interests of the body.

A hubbub ensued ; a strong party of Clack's friends raising shouts on his behalf, while opposing cries rose on all sides of " Down with the blusterer ! " " Who waylaid the carrier ? " " He is none of us. The Union keeps the laws." " Law and concord ! No Clack ! "

Quiet was restored on Mr. Wentworth's rising to explain that his being present was not to be considered as a sign that the masters would yield on Clack's dismissal. He had no authority to confirm any such belief.

Applause,—and Clack doomed by an overwhelming majority ; whereupon his supporters made their way to the wagon, agreed with him that the meeting was not worth addressing, even if he *had* been allowed to speak ; and carried him off on their shoulders to fish for popularity in the streets of Manchester, while the meeting conducted its affairs as well as it could without him. So ended that matter, except that somehow Clack and his party were forestalled in their return into the town, and the walls everywhere presented, conspicuous in white chalk, the phrase which still rang in their ears, " Law and Concord ! No Clack ! " An extraordinary number

of little boys too seemed to have taken the fancy to mimick the action of weaving, with arm and foot, crying at the same time

" Clickity, clickity, clack,
Lay him on his back !
Clickity, clickity, clack,
Away let him pack !"

Far more decorous was the meeting in their rear, while the queries were dismissed, each in its turn.

" The case of Ann Howlett being admitted by all parties to be a hard one, (her contract being for wages which would not support her,) was her breach of contract sanctioned by the Union ? "

Shouts of " No ; we would have helped her to perform it ! "

" If this breach of contract had been sanctioned by the Union, was it thought lawful revenge for the committal of Ann Howlett to waylay the carrier and strip his cart ? "

Groans, and shouts of " No revenge ! "

Some one near the cart having spoken to Allen, he put the question,—

" Supposing this attack to have no connexion with Ann Howlett's affair, does the Union sanction forcible attempts to prevent work being carried into the country ? "

Answer, " No. Law and Concord for ever ! "

" If the men abide by the law, and the masters are found disposed to concord, will the Union be disposed to concession ? "

Mixed cries, the most distinguishable of which was, " Stick by the Union ! The Union for ever ! "

Mr. Wentworth and Allen exchanged nods, ~~as~~ much as to say, " You see"—" Yes, I see."

" Supposing the Union to be preserved entire, are its members disposed to any concession in respect of wages ? "

Cries of " Equalization ! "

" An equalization is, as the Committee knows, indispensable ; but the point on which the Committee has not yet received your instructions is whether that equalization may be fixed below the highest rate, *viz.*, that which Elliott is now giving ? "

The answers were at first hesitating, then confused, so that no one prevailed.

" Don't press for an answer yet," said Mr. Wentworth. " I may tell them something which may help their judgments."

Way was made for Mr. Wentworth, and he presented himself to speak.

" Before you put this question to the vote, let me just mention a circumstance or two that you may not be aware of, from your having been lately out of communication with the factories. There are few things that we hear more of than of the changes that all mortal things are liable to ; and these changes affect the affair we have in hand, like all other affairs. We are told that every one rises from sleep in the morning a different man from him who lay down at night ; there having been a waste and repair of the substance of which the bodily man is composed. In the same manner, you may find that your strike is a different thing to-day from what it was at its beginning. Some of its parts have fallen off,

and others have been added. Whether your body, having undergone this change, be the more vigorous, like a man refreshed by sleep, you know better than I. But further, whenever you return to your work, you may find a factory a very different place on re-entering from what it was on your leaving it. There has been much waste, I fear, without any repair. You know what kind of waste I refer to. You have heard of large orders which we have been unable to execute, having been sent to Scotland and elsewhere. You know that much of our capital, which ought by this time to be returning to us again, has been for many weeks locked up in our stocks of raw material. You know that the expense of keeping on our establishments has not been repaid by the production of goods for the market; or the cost of maintaining ourselves and our families, by the profitable employment of our time and our wits. We have been consuming idly, and so have you; and thus there must needs have been great waste.—And what is it which has been thus wasted? The fund which is to maintain you; the fund out of which your wages are paid. Your strike has already lasted long enough to change our ground of dispute. You will find that the question with the masters now is, whether fewer of you than before shall be employed at the same wages, or fewer still at higher wages, or as many as before at lower wages, than you have yet received. Keep on your strike a little longer, and the question will be, how many less shall be employed, at how much less.

Keep it on long enough, and the question will be entirely settled ; there will be no wages for any body. Do you understand me ?"

The speaker took snuff while the murmur of disapprobation went round, and then continued.

" I do not suppose, any more than you, that we shall come to this pass, because your capital must be exhausted sooner than ours, and then you must have bread, and will come to us for work before our fund for wages is all wasted away ; but the nearer you drive us to this point, the more injury you do yourselves. Let me hear your objection, friend," he continued, to a man in the crowd who looked eager to speak. " Where do you think me wrong ? You acknowledge that a strike is a bad thing, but sometimes necessary to obtain a good one. Refusing wages altogether for a time, is to be the means of securing better afterwards. Do I understand you right ? Why, that would be very true if you had the power or were in the habit of keeping workmen and wages in proportion to each other. If the masters had more capital than was necessary to pay you all at the rate you have hitherto received, you might gain your point by a strike, not as you sometimes do now, just for a little time till the masters can shake themselves free of their engagement,—but permanently. But this is not the case. The masters' capital does not return enough to pay you all at the rate you desire. If they are to keep their capital entire, you must either take less wages, or fewer of you must take wages at all.

If you will all have the wages you desire, the capital which pays them wastes away, and ruin approaches. This is the worst event that could happen, as I am sure we shall all agree. Your alternative, therefore, is to withdraw a portion of your people from taking wages, or all to take less than you are striking for. You are not satisfied yet? (speaking to the same man.) Well, let me hear. There are places where there are no strikes, because the workmen get as high wages as they wish for? Very true; there are such places, and London is one; concerning which I heard, the other day, a case in point.

"The money wages of skilled labour in London were higher from 1771 to 1793 than was ever known. They had been raised because prices were high. They were afterwards somewhat lowered; but as prices fell in a greater proportion after the war, the real wages of skilled labour are at present higher than they had ever been. They cannot be lowered while, as at present, there is an occasional deficiency of labour, since the men would strike when most wanted by the masters, and the loss thus caused would be greater than the gain of giving lower wages. In London there are two seasons in every year; a slack season in which many workmen remain unemployed; and a busy season in which they work overhours, because there are not hands enough. Now, here, you see, lies their advantage; in the supply of labour being limited. If it was the case with them, as with you, that some of their class always remained unemployed, the

unemployed would undersell the busy, and wages would fail. Then, as here, there would be strikes ; and then, as here, strikes would be of no avail. Where there are permanently fewer workmen than are wanted, the men hold the power. Where there is the exact number that is wanted, the power is equal, and the contest fair. Where there are more than are wanted, even to the extent of three unemployed to a hundred, the power is in the masters' hands, and strikes must fail. Must there not be a larger surplus of unemployed labour than this in our neighbourhood, and elsewhere; since wages have fallen too low to enable the labourer to do more than barely exist ? Allen, is there a silk small-ware weaver present, do you suppose ? "They have just struck, I find."

Proclamation was made for a silk small-ware weaver, and several held up their hands. In answer to questions, they stated that within two years their wages had been reduced forty-five per cent. Two years before, common galloon weaving was paid at the rate of 1s. 10d. per gross, it was now reduced to 1s. 4d. per gross ; and it was for an addition of 2d. per gross, that the men struck : little enough when it is considered that, in the winter season, a weaver cannot average more than twelve gross per week. As he has to pay for the hire of his loom, for winding, for candle-light, and other expenses belonging to his work, he has left only about 8s. a week for himself and his family.

" Could so dreadful a reduction have ever

taken place," continued Mr. Wentworth, "if you had not undersold one another? And how are the masters to help you if you go on increasing your numbers and underselling one another, as if your employers could find occupation for any number of millions of you, or could coin the stones under your feet into wages, or knead the dust of the earth into bread? They do what they can for you in increasing the capital on which you are to subsist; and you must do the rest by proportioning your numbers to the means of subsistence. But see how the masters are met! In Huddersfield the masters are doing their utmost to extend their trade; but the multitudes who are to subsist by it increase much faster. There are now thirteen thousand work-people in that place who toil for twopence half-penny a day. At Todmorden, the most skilful work fourteen hours a day for the pittance of one shilling. In the fair county of Kent there are thirty thousand who earn no more than sixpence a day. Compare this state of things with the condition of skilled labour wages in London, and see how much depends on the due proportion of labourers, and the capital by which they are to be fed. Would you could be convinced that your strike, besides occasioning vexation and ill-will between the two parties, besides inflicting distress upon yourselves, and inconvenience upon your employers, cannot but be worse than in vain!"

During the last few sentences, several persons had been engaged in conference with Bray, who

leaned over a corner of the waggon to hear what they had to say. He now came forward and placed himself beside Mr. Wentworth, observing that all that had fallen from the gentleman seemed pretty true and reasonable as far as it went, but that it did not at all explain what course the people had now to pursue. It was poor comfort to tell the people that wages could not be any higher on account of their numbers, since it was not in their power to lessen those numbers.

"It is not with the view of giving present comfort," replied Mr. Wentworth, "that I represent what appears to me to be the truth; for alas! there is but little comfort in the case any way. My object is to prevent your making a bad case worse; and, if it were possible, to persuade you not to prepare for your descendants a repetition of the evils under which you are yourselves suffering. All that you can now do, is to live as you best may upon such wages as the masters can give, keeping up your sense of respectability and your ambition to improve your state when better times shall come. You must watch every opportunity of making some little provision against the fluctuations of our trade, contributing your money rather for your mutual relief in hard times, than for the support of strikes. You must place your children out to different occupations, choosing those which are least likely to be overstocked; and above all, you must discourage in them the imprudent, early marriages to which are mainly owing the distresses

which afflict yourselves and those which will for some time, I fear, oppress your children. You ask me what you must do. These things are all that I can suggest."

"But these things, sir, will not guard our children any more than ourselves from the fluctuations in trade you speak of."

"But they will prevent those fluctuations from being so injurious as they now are. The lower wages are, the more are such fluctuations felt. In India, where an average day's wages are only three-pence, the people live in the poorest possible manner,—such as the poorest of you have no idea of. Any decrease of wages, therefore, makes the more weakly of the labourers lie down and die. In Ireland, where the average is five-pence a day, there is less positive starvation than in India, but more distress on a fall of wages, than in England. In England, such fluctuations are less felt than in old days, when the people knew nothing of many things which you now call necessaries. The better the state of the people, the better able are they to stand against the changes to which all trades are liable, but the worst of it is that we are all too little inclined to foresee the effects of these changes, and to provide for them; and when we experience the necessary consequences of a change which took place twenty years before, we are apt to suppose these consequences arise from something amiss at the present time. When a demand for any article of manufacture makes labour unusually profitable, labourers provide for

a great decline of wages in future years, by bringing up large families to the same employment. During many years, that is, while their children are growing up, they feel no ill effects, and suppose that all is going on right. When a decline of wages comes, they suppose it happens from some new circumstance, and not from their own deed in overstocking the labour market. Again; it must be some time before the effects of a decline in lessening the supply of labour are felt. A part of the population perishes slowly from want and misery, and others are made prudent in respect of marriage; but by the time these checks are seen to operate, a new period of prosperity has arrived, which is ascribed by the people to accident. It is this impossibility of making the supply of labour suit the demand at a moment's notice, which makes fluctuations in trade so sensibly felt, for good or for evil, by the labourer. Since he cannot, as you say, Mr. Bray, diminish the number of workmen when trade is slack, and if he wishes his descendants not to be plunged into degradation by extreme poverty, he will do what in him lies to prevent population from increasing faster than the capital which is to support it."

Mr. Wentworth was encouraged to pursue his argumentative manner of speaking by the attention of the people near the waggon. Some of them had become a little tired of the weekly meetings at which their orators had said the same things over and over again, and were pleased to be reasoned with by one whom they

esteemed, and to obtain, by these means, a better insight into their affairs than was given them by leaders who were all of one party. The more the present meeting assumed the character of a conference, the more eagerly the most thinking men in the crowd pressed towards the waggon, and cheered the questions and replies. Those on the outskirts, who were more fond of noise and display, were at liberty to come and go as they pleased; to listen to Mr. Wentworth, or to follow Clack.

Bray now observed that population must increase rapidly indeed, as it had outstripped the increase of capital in the cotton manufacture. He believed so rapid an increase of capital had never been known before. To this Mr. Wentworth replied by asking of the crowd whether there was any one among them who had known James Hargraves. An old man stept forwards and said that he was a native of Blackburn, and had been accustomed, as a boy, to frequent Hargraves' workshop; that he remembered seeing the carpenter busy about his invention, and his own delight at having the design of the spinning-jenny explained to him by the inventor; he saw directly how eight threads could be spun instead of one, and thought it a very fine thing, and had little notion how soon it would be so much improved upon as that a little girl might work one hundred, or one hundred and twenty spindles. When was this? Why, a few years after the old king George began to reign; in 1767, he believed.

"When that king came to the throne," observed Mr. Wentworth, "the whole value of the cotton goods manufactured in this country was only 200,000*l.* a year."

"There were very few people employed in it then," interrupted the old man. "We had no factories and no towns full of cotton-spinners and weavers. My father used to take his work home to his own cottage, and grow the flax that was then used for warp in his own garden, and set my mother to card and spin the raw cotton for the weft. This, and getting the warp from Ireland, was the way till Arkwright's spinning frame came into use."

"Then was the time," said Mr. Wentworth, "that the people in China and in India had no rivals in the market for whatever was made of cotton. We owe it to these machines, and the mule-jenny, and the power-loom that came in afterwards, that though we have to bring our cotton from thousands of miles off, and though the wages in India are, as I said, only 3*d.* a day, we have beaten them in the competition, and can carry back their cotton five thousand miles, made into a cheaper fabric than they can afford. Such powers as these must make our capital grow; and the fact is that the cotton manufacture is the chief business carried on in the country, and that it has enabled us to sustain burdens which would have crushed any other people. Instead of 200,000*l.*, the annual produce of the manufacture is now more than 36,000,000*l.* We have no means of knowing how few persons were

employed sixty years ago; but it is reckoned that the manufacture now affords subsistence to more than 1,400,000 persons. This enormous population has arisen naturally enough from the rise of the manufacture; but your present condition shows that it has already gone too far; and it rests with yourselves to determine whether the evil shall be found to have increased fifty years hence. And now, Allen, you know the reason of the clause I added to your query in the arbour."

"Will our trade go on increasing?" was the next question asked.

"I hope and trust that it will, as we have got the start of our competitors abroad; but it will probably increase at a slower rate; and a succession of strikes may prove its destruction."

Here the speaker abruptly ceased, and nothing could induce him to say more. He let himself down from the waggon, and quietly made his way through the crowd, thinking perhaps that the people would draw their inferences from what he had said more freely in his absence.

The substance of Mr. Wentworth's argument, and especially the last words he spoke, left Allen and others thoughtful. They would not, on the impulse of the moment, advise a compromise with the masters; but appointed another general meeting for the next day, to take into consideration some matters of important concern.

One matter of important concern was taken into immediate consideration, however. As soon as Allen had turned his back, some mem-

bers of the committee recalled the crowd for a few minutes, related how Allen had, from time to time, refused money in compensation for his services, and moved that a suit of clothes should be voted to him. This was a present which he could not refuse, if given under colour of enabling him to appear more respectably as their advocate before the masters, and would serve to make a proper distinction between such a sound friend to their cause as Allen, and such a frothy fellow as Clack. The motion was carried by acclamation; and as all Allen's scruples were so forestalled as that he could not decline the gift, he was, before nightfall, clothed in a suit which must mark him out at the meetings as leader of the Union proceedings.

CHAPTER X.

HOPES DECLINING.

Alas! what is so fleeting as popularity! Allen's was in great part gone before morning. Some mischievously disposed persons, who had marked what impression had been made on the mind of the secretary by Mr. Wentworth's speech, and who had afterwards ascertained that he wished to propose a compromise with the masters, took upon themselves to make known that the favourite

secretary had turned tail and meant to betray the cause. A general gathering about the waggon of all who scorned to be betrayed was advised, in order to keep his friends at a distance and to raise a hiss with the more effect. When, confident of his reception, Allen advanced with a smiling countenance, in order to express his gratification at the mark of esteem he had received, he was startled by a burst of groans and hisses. For a moment he looked about him to see if Clack or any other unpopular person was standing near; but signs not to be mistaken convinced him too soon that he was the object of the people's dislike. He coloured scarlet, and was about to cover his face with his hands, but checked himself, and, by a strong effort, stood it out. Those who were near him saw how the papers in his hand shook; but his countenance was fixed and his attitude firm. After many vain attempts to make himself heard, he stripped off his new coat, folded it up and placed it in the hands of the committee-men near, and sent a messenger home for his working dress. This he communicated to the meeting, the first moment that they would let him speak. He would not accept any gift from those to whom his services were no longer acceptable. He was ready to resign his office,—an arduous office, which they no doubt remembered had been forced upon him,—as soon as they should direct him into whose hands he should deliver his papers. In the meanwhile, he would proceed with their business, forgetful of all personal considerations.

" All propositions, whether made by himself or others, tending to a compromise were rejected, and the meeting, after a stormy discussion, in which no point was settled, broke up. The whole affair put Chack and his friends in glee, and filled wiser people with grief and apprehension of the consequences.

The first consequence was that all the children were turned off. The masters were bent on bringing the affair to a close as speedily as possible; and, being disappointed in the hope that the men would propose a compromise, endeavoured to drive them to it.

This was thought by some parents far from being the worst thing that had happened. While the Committee shook their heads over this weighty additional item of weekly charge, many tender mothers stroked their children's heads and smiled when they wished them joy of their holiday, and bade them sleep on in the mornings without thinking of the factory bell. — It was some days before the little things got used to so strange a difference from their usual mode of life. Some would start up from sound sleep with the question, " Father, is it time ? " Some talked in their sleep of being too late, and went on to devour their meals hastily, as if their time was not their own.—It would have amused some people and made others melancholy to watch the sports of these town-bred children. One little girl was seen making a garden :—that is, boring a hole between two flints in a yard with a rusty pair of scissors, and inserting therein a

daisy which by some rare chance had reached her hands. Others collected the fragments of broken plates and tumups from the kennels, and spread them out for a mock feast where there was nothing to eat. The favourite game was playing at being cotton-spinners, a big boy frowning and strutting and personating the master, another with a switch in his hand being the overseer, and the rest spinners or piecers, each trying which could be the naughtiest and get the most threats and scolding. Many were satisfied with loitering on the stairs of their dwellings and looking into the streets all day long; and many nursed their baby brothers and sisters, sitting on the steps or leaning against the walls of the street. Hannah Bray, when not abroad with her father, took pains to stir up her little neighbours to what she called play. She coaxed her father into giving them a ball, and tried to teach the children in the next yard to play hide and seek; but she often said she never before saw such helpless and awkward people. They could not throw a ball five feet from them, or flung it in one another's faces so as to cause complaints and crying-fits. In hiding, they always showed themselves, or came out too soon or not soon enough, or jostled and threw one another down; and they were the worst runners that could be conceived. Any one of them trying to catch Hannah looked like a deer running after a greyhound. Hannah began with laughing at them all round; but observing that her father watched their play with tears in his eyes, she afterwards condescended

herself with wondering in silence why some children were so unlike others.

The affairs of all concerned in the strike looked more and more dismal every day. There were more brawls in the streets ; there was less peace at home ; for none are so prone to quarrel as those who have nothing else to do, and whose tempers are at the same time fretted by want. All the men who were prone to drink now spent hour after hour at the alehouse, and many a woman now for the first time took to her "drop of comfort" at home. Many a man who had hitherto been a helper to his wife and tender to his children, began to slam the door behind him, after having beaten or shaken the little ones all round, and spoken rough words to their trembling mother. While she, dashing away her tears, looked for something to do, and found one thing that she would wash if she had fuel and soap, and another that she would mend if she had material and cotton.—Now was the time to see the young woman, with the babe in her arms, pushing at the curtained door of the dram-shop, while her husband held it against her,—he saying,—"Well, I tell you I'm coming in five minutes ; I shan't be five minutes,"—and she plaintively replying, "Ah, I know, you always say so."—Now was the time to see the good son pacing slowly to the pawnbroker's to pledge his aged mother's last blanket to buy her bread. These were the days when the important men under the three balls civilly declared, or insolently swore, that they could and would take no more goods in

pawn, as their houses were full from top to bottom, and there was no sale for what they had encumbered themselves with. Never before had they been so humbly petitioned for loans,—a mother shewing that her winter shawl or her child's frock would take very little room,—or a young girl urging that if a pawnbroker did not want her grandmother's old bible, he could get more for it at a book-stall than she could. These were the times for poor landlords to look after their rents, and for hard landlords to press for them. Those were the days for close scrutiny to be made by the Union Committee whether men's wives were really lying-in, and whether each really had the number of children he swore to; and therefore, these were the times when knaves tried to cheat and when honest men were wounded at having their word questioned. Now was the time when weak minded men thought themselves each worse off than his neighbour. Many landlords were pronounced the hardest that ever owned two paltry rooms; many an applicant was certain the committee had been set against him by some sneaking enemy. In the abstract it was allowed, however, that the *sneakers* had the most to bear. Hare, for one, was in the depth of distress. Opposition was made, week after week, to his having any relief from the committee because he was not a hearty member of the Union; and on one occasion, when he had with the utmost difficulty obtained an extra shilling for his lying-in wife, and had failed in his plea that he was dunned for rent, he found on

returning home that his landlord had sent in the officers during his absence, who had taken away all the little he possessed, but the mattress on which his wife lay. It was laid on the floor, the bedstead being gone; and the children and their mother were left crying within four bare walls.—Allen, to whose knowledge this hard case was brought, could do little to relieve it; but he almost succeeded in convincing his nervous wife that their own sufferings were light in comparison. Yet they had many painful sacrifices to make,—the more painful to Allen because his wife was not convinced that they were necessary. She urged that he might now ask for some of the money the Committee had formerly offered him, since his services had not been repaid even in empty good-will, to the degree that he deserved. It was his duty, she thought, to demand more than the common weekly allowance; and the least he could do for his children was to take the suit of clothes back again which he had thrown away in a pet. Failing in her arguments, she had recourse to two measures,—one of action and the other of persuasion. She went secretly to the Committee and asked in her husband's name for the clothes, which she sold on her way home, trying to persuade herself that she was only doing a mother's duty in providing her children with bread; and then she assailed her husband on the subject of taking work at the masters' prices. She knew that he now wished for a compromise and thought the strike had been continued too long, and she

would not see why he was bound to wait till the Union viewed the matter as he did. She thought it very cruel to talk of honour, and very absurd to plead duty, when he knew that his family were in want, and could not deny that it was not by his own choice that he had filled so conspicuous a station. It made Allen very miserable to hear her talk in this manner, sobbing between almost every word she said; especially when little Martha looked wistfully from one to the other, not understanding the grounds of the dispute, but hoping that it would end in father's leaving off walking about the room in that manner, and in mother's stopping her sobs, and in there being something better than those nasty potatoes for dinner. Once or twice she tried to make her bullfinch sing so loud that they could not hear one another speak; but this did not do, for her mother twitched off her apron and flung it over the cage, so that the poor bird cowered down in a corner for the whole day afterwards.

"One morning when Allen had persuaded his wife that he was immovable, and that the best thing she could do was to go out and buy some potatoes with what money they had, he came and leaned over the table to see Martha feed her bird.

"You are as fond of that bird as ever, Martha."

"Yes,—and I have so much time to teach him things now."

"Had you rather play with him or be at the factory all day?"

"I don't know. My knees are so much better

since I have been at home; and I like playing with Billy; but mother has got to cry so lately; and, father, we are all so tired of potatoes; we don't know how to eat them."

"Poor child! I wish we could give you anything better. But, Martha, do you think you could bear to stay at home without Billy?"

Martha's countenance fell.

" You see, my dear child, we have sold almost everything we have; and when we can scarcely get food for ourselves, it does not seem to me right to keep animals to feed. This was why I sold the dog so many weeks ago."

"But, father, it is only just a halfpenny now and then. Mother has always found me a halfpenny now and then for Billy."

"A halfpenny is as much to us now, child, as a guinea is to some people; besides, we could get money by Billy. Ah! I knew it would make you cry to say so."

And he left her and walked about the room in the way which it always frightened Martha to see. She sobbed out a few words,

"I can't—I can't help crying, father, but I don't mean—I wish you would take Billy and sell him."

"Listen to me, my dear child," said Allen, sitting down by her, and putting his arm round her waist. "You were always a very good little girl in working industriously as long as you had work. Now you cannot earn money by working, but you can get some by giving up your bird. Now, you know I always tried to make you as comfortable as I could when you earned

money, and I promise you, that I will do the same if you will let me sell your bird. The very first money that I can properly spare, when better days come, shall go to buy you a bird, and this very bird if we can get it back again."

Martha thanked him, and said the bird should go for certain ; but if this very bird could not be got back again, she would rather have a triangle like Hannah's, and then, she thought, they might all grow rich. Allen smiled and said they would see about that, when the time came ; in the meanwhile, if Billy was to go, the sooner the better, and all the more as she had just cleaned the cage : and he took his hat.

Martha struggled with her tears, and asked if she might go too. Her father thought she had better not ; but she said nobody could make Billy sing all his songs so well as herself ; so her father kissed her, and let her follow him down stairs, asking Field's wife, who happened to be in good humour, to have an eye to the children till their mother came home.

It was a sad trial to Martha to hear the bird-fancier speak slightly of her pet, and remark that the cage was very shabby. She had a great mind at first to make Billy seem dull, which she knew how to do ; but remembering that this would punish nobody but her father, she put away the evil thought, and made Billy sing his best songs in his clearest tone. The bargain was made ; her father bade the bird-fancier pay the money into her hand, and whispered that he wished he had anything which would sell for so

much. When they were on the threshold, she once more turned round. The man was twirling the cage in a business-like manner, between his hands. "O, once more!" cried Martha, running back. Once more Billy fluttered at the sight of her, and put out his beak between the wires to meet her lips; and then she went away without looking back any more. Every day for the next fortnight, however, little Martha hungered about the bud-fancier's door, doing all she could without being observed, to set Billy singing. One day she was remarked by her parents to be very silent; and after that she went out less. She had missed Billy, though his empty cage still hung in the shop; and having made bold to ask, had found that he was sold to a country customer; really gone for ever. This hope destroyed, Martha tried to comfort herself, as she had proposed, with visions of a triangle.

CHAPTER XI.

FINAL DELIBERATION.

THE spirits of the people were sunk; not only by poverty, but by a more bitter disappointment than had attended any former strike. The Combination Laws having formerly been the great object of dread and hatred, it had been too hastily supposed that the repeal of these laws would

give all that was wanted; whereas the repeal only left the people free to make the best bargain they could for their labour, without its having anything to do with the grounds of the bargain. The repeal could not increase the supply of capital, or diminish the supply of labour; it could not therefore affect the rate of wages.

One more event was looked to with hope: the arrival of the delegates who had travelled in search of support. They had remitted money as they had received it, and the remittances had fallen off much of late; but it was still hoped that the messengers might bring such assurances of sympathy and support, as might justify the people in holding out a little longer. These men, who returned nearly all at the same time, were met some miles out on the road, greeted with cheers, carried to the Committee-room, and with difficulty left alone with the Committee to tell their business.

These men brought advice and intelligence so various, as might have perplexed the most discerning and prudent of all managers of public affairs. There were exhortations from some places to hold out to the very last shilling; and from others to retreat, while retreat could be managed with honour. Some distant friends gave them a kindly warning to look for no more contributions from that quarter; and others were sorry to send so little at present, but hoped to raise such and such sums before they should be much wanted. Some sent word that it had always been a bad case which they could not

in conscience support, while so many, more promising, needed help ; others declared that if ever there was a righteous cause, this was it, and that they should brand with the name of traitor the first who quailed. While the members of the committee sighed and inquired of one another what they were to think of such opposite advice, and each delegate was vehement in urging the superior value of that which he brought, Allen proposed that they should abide by the advice of the London delegates, who had been in communication with persons who understood more of the matter in hand, than any who occupied a less central situation. All agreed to this, and the consideration of the matter was deferred till the next morning, when the delegates were expected to have arrived from London.

Every member of the committee was in his place the next morning, and the expected messengers appeared at the foot of the table, and delivered in their report, which was brief enough. Their London friends believed their strike to be in a hopeless condition, and advised their making the best terms they could with their masters, without any further waste of time and capital. Not that all combinations were disapproved of by their London advisers ; there were cases in which such union was highly desirable, cases of especial grievance from multiplication of apprentices, or from unfair methods of measuring work, or from gross inequality of wages, &c. ; but for a general and permanent rise of wages, no strike could ultimately prevail, where there was a permanent

proportion of unemployed labour in the market. A proportion of three per cent. of unemployed labour must destroy their chance against the masters.

"Just what Wentworth told us," observed a committee-man. "Pray did you inquire whether it is possible to get a rate of wages settled by law?"

"Of course, as we were instructed so to do; and the answer is what you probably expect,—that unless the law could determine the amount of capital, and the supply of labour, it cannot regulate wages. The law might as well order how much beef every man shall eat for his daily dinner, without having any power to supply cattle. If there be not cattle enough, men cannot have law beef. If there be not capital enough, men cannot have law wages."

"Besides," observed the other delegate, "wages-laws involve the same absurdity as the combination laws we are so glad to have got rid of. Every man who is not a slave has a right to ask a price for his labour; and if one man has this right, so have fifty or fifty thousand. What is an innocent act in itself, cannot be made guilty by being done by numbers; and if Government treats it as guilt, Government treats those who do it as slaves. Government then interferes where it has no business. This was the argument in the case of the combination laws, and it holds in this case too: Government is neither buyer nor seller, and has nothing to do with the bargain; and having nothing to do with it, could

neither pass a just wages-law, nor enforce it when passed, any more than in the case of the combination laws, which we all know to have been unjust and perpetually evaded."

As it was now clear that the turn-out must come to a speedy end, the committee "decided to waste no more time in discussion, but to proceed to immediate action. Allen begged to produce the accounts, which were balanced up to the present day, and the sight of which would, he thought, quicken their determination to let all get work who could. He had for some time found it difficult to get a bearing on the subject of the accounts, as his brethren were bent on holding out, and would listen to nothing which opposed their wishes, but they were now completely roused. "How much have we left?" was their first question.

"Left!" exclaimed Allen. "You know I have been telling you for this fortnight past that we are deficient 70*l*, without reckoning the bills for advertisements, which had not then come in, and which, I am sorry to say, swell the amount considerably."

This declaration was received with murmurs, and on the part of some, with loud declarations that there must have been mistake or bad management.

Allen passed his hand over his forehead, while enduring the bitter pang caused by this outcry; but he recovered himself instantly.

"There are the accounts," he said. "See for yourselves whether there has been any mistake,

and bring home to me, if you can, your charge of bad management. You pressed the task upon me in the first instance against my will ; you referred it to my disinterestedness to resume it, when, fearing that I had lost the confidence of the people, I would have resigned it. At your call, I have done my best, and—this is my reward!"

There was a cry of "Shame, shame!" and two or three friends rose in turn to say for Allen what he was too modest to say for himself ; that the unthankful office had been repeatedly forced upon him, because there was no other man who could discharge it so well ; that he had never been detected in a mistake, never found in the rear of his business, never accepting fee or reward, never—

This eulogium was interrupted by objections. He *had* erred in involving the Union with the editor of a newspaper, who now unexpectedly brought an enormous charge for the insertion of notices, intelligence, &c., which it had been supposed he was glad to print gratuitously. Allen *had* also claimed fee and reward in a way which, to say the best of it, was shabby.

Allen calmly related the facts of the transaction with the editor, leaving it to his judges to decide whether the misunderstanding arose from carelessness on his part, or from some other cause. As to the other charge, what fee or reward had he taken?

"The clothes, the clothes!" was the cry. "To send for them privately to sell, after pre-

tending to give them back in the face of the people. Fie! Shabby!"

Allen looked on his thread-bare dress with a smile, supposing this a mistake which a moment would clear up. He went to the press belonging to the committee, where the clothes had been deposited, and flung open the doors. He looked very naturally surprised at their having disappeared, and turned round with an open countenance to say,

"I see how it is. Some dishonest person has used my name to obtain possession of the clothes. I give you my word of honour that I have never seen the clothes, or known that they were not here, since the hour that I gave them back in the face of the people."

All believed him, and some had consideration enough to command silence by gesture; but before it could take effect, the fact was out, that Allen's own wife was the "dishonest person." While he silently walked to the window, and there hid his face in his hands, his friends called on business which attracted attention from him. It was pay-day, and what was to be done? What funds were in hand?

Allen returned to his seat to answer this question; and, as all were just now disposed to do as he pleased, he carried his point of honesty, and obtained authority to lessen the allowance one-half, and give advice to every applicant to attend the afternoon meeting for the purpose of voting for the dissolution of the strike.

Of these applicants, some were glad, and some

were sorry to receive the advice of the paymaster; but there was a much greater unity of opinion about the reduction of the allowance. Some resented, some clamoured, some silently wept, some sighed in resignation; but all felt it a great hardship, and wondered what was to become of them either way, if it was true, as Mr. Wentworth had said, that the wages fund of the masters and the Union-fund of the men were wasting away together. Some were ready with bad news for Allen in return for that which he offered to them.

" You will be worst off, after all, Allen; for there is not a master that will give you work."

" Did you hear, Allen, what Elliott said about you? He hopes you will go to him for work, that he may have the pleasure of refusing you"

" Mortimer has got a promise out of his cowardly partner, that he will not let you set foot on the premises, Allen, on account of the part you have taken."

" They say, Allen, that you are a marked man in Manchester, and that no master in any trade will take you in among his men. What do you think of doing, I wonder?"

This question Allen could not have answered if he had wished it. It was again put to him by his wife, who waited for him in the street to tell him through her tears all the evil-bodings which a succession of Job's comforters had been pouring into her ears since the news of the probable dissolution of the strike had got wind. " What

"do you think of doing, I wonder?" was still the burden of her wail.

"Do you know that man?" replied her husband, pointing to a wasted and decrepit man who was selling matches; "that man was once a well-paid spinner. He lost his health in his employment, and now, at forty years of age, is selling matches from door to door. He has submitted to God's will. I too will submit to sell matches; if it be God's will that I should lose my good name as innocently as that man has lost his health."

"I told you how it would be. I told you—" cried Mary.

"I too foresaw it, Mary, and prepared myself for much;—but not for all."

He reproached her no further for the injury she had done to his good name than by declaring his unalterable will that not an article should be purchased by her beyond a bare supply of daily food till the clothes were bought back again and restored to the Committee, or their full value, if they could not be recovered.

CHAPTER XII.

HOPE EXTINCT.

THERE had been a lingering hope among some who would fain have stood out longer, that this day's post would have brought the wherewithal

to build up new expectations and prolong the struggle. The wiser ones had resolved that not even the receipt of £200 should shake their determination to return to work ; but there was no question about the matter, for no money came.—A prodigious amount of business was done in the few hours preceding the final meeting. The masters met and settled that they would give no more than the medium wages,—that is, the rate given by Wentworth ; Elliott carelessly consenting to lower his, and Mortimer being with difficulty persuaded to raise his. Rowe was consulted only as a matter of form, and the other firms had to make slight differences or none at all. They agreed to yield the point of their men belonging to the Union, since it appeared vain to contest it while of importance, and needless when not so.—The men settled that they must agree to a medium rate of wages, and make what they could of having obtained an equalization, such as it was, and of being permitted to adhere to the Union.—Clack agitated for his own private interest,—to get himself appointed to some salaried office in the Union, as he was no more likely to obtain employment from the masters than Allen.—So much was settled beforehand as to leave little to be done at the meeting but to make a public declaration of agreement.

With dark countenances and lagging steps the people came,—not in proud procession, with banners and music and a soldier-like march, but in small parties or singly, dropping into the track from by-streets and lanes, and looking as if they

were going to punishment rather than to consultation. There was a larger proportion than usual of ragged women and crying babies; for, as the women had been all along opposed to the strike, they were sensible of a feeling of mournful triumph in seeing it dissolved. Bray was present, without his pipe and his bells, for this was no time for lively music; but he carried his drum to be used as a signal for silence if the speakers should find any difficulty in obtaining a hearing. He beat a roll between each proposition submitted and agreed to; and thus did his last service to the turn-out he had watched from its commencement.

Proposed:—That as the masters are represented to be inclined to concession, the men shall do their part towards promoting an adjustment of their differences, agreeing to take such and such a rate of wages, provided that the masters pay all alike, and that the men be not disturbed in their peaceable adherence to the Union.—
Agreed.

Proposed:—That the men shall set apart a portion of their weekly earnings, as soon as able to do so, and in proportion to the size of their families, in order to liquidate the debt incurred on account of the strike now about to be closed.—Murmurs.

Allen came forward to state the gross amount of subscriptions and expenses, intimating that the account-books would be left at the Committee-room for one month, open to the inspection of all who could prove themselves to belong

to the Union. It would be seen through what unavoidable circumstances a debt had been incurred, and how essential it was to the honour of the body that it should be liquidated as soon as possible.

No reasonable exception could be made to any of the items of expenditure. The people could only wonder that there should be such crowds of children to receive pay, so many lying-in women to be relieved, so many sick persons to be aided, and so much to pay for printing and advertising. They could not deny that the expenses of the Committee had been very small.

This explanation finished, Allen's part was done. He had neither faults of his own nor favours of theirs to acknowledge. He spoke not of himself, but, when he had rendered his account, gravely made his bow and retired.

Clack then came forward, and, supported by a powerful party of friends near the waggon, succeeded in obtaining the public ear. With more success than delicacy, he enlarged upon his public services, pleaded his betrothal to one who was now suffering under the persecution of the masters, as a title to their support, as well as the certainty that he should not again be employed by any firm in Manchester. He declared that were it only through zeal for their rights, he would marry Ann Howlett as soon as she came out of prison—

"If she will have you," cried somebody; and the crowd laughed.

Clack repeated his declaration without noticing

the doubt, and moreover declared his willingness to travel into every county in England, Scotland, and Ireland, in behalf of the Union. He boasted of his connexions in all places, and pointed out the wisdom there would be in employing him as a missionary of the Union, in preparation for any future struggle.—This proposal went a degree too far in impudence, or Clack might, perhaps, have gained his object; for he seemed to have recovered his hold on the people in proportion as that of better men had been weakened. A plain statement from the Committee that, as they were in debt, they had no power at present to appoint a missionary, served, however, to disappoint Clack's hopes. He skilfully laid hold of the words "at present," and left it an understood matter between himself and the people that the office was to be his by and by.

Within half an hour, not a trace of the meeting was left but the trampled grass and the empty waggon. The people seemed to try who could flee the fastest, some to obtain the first access to the masters, some to get out of sight of a scene which had become disagreeable, and some few to talk big at the Spread-Eagle of what might have happened if this cowardly Committee would but have stood out a little longer.

Allen's steps were directed to Mr. Wentworth's counting-house. "I will ask work of him and of him only, in this line," thought he. "If I fail, I must take to some other occupation. They can hardly be all shut against an honest man."

" 'I am sorry for you, Allen,' was Mr. Wentworth's reply when, with some difficulty, Allen had made his way through a crowd of people on the same errand with himself. " But you shall pronounce upon the case yourself. I can employ now only two-thirds of the number who turned out from me. Of these, at least half left me unwillingly, and have therefore the first title to employment; and the rest have worked for my firm for many years. At the best, I must refuse many whose services I should be glad to keep; judge then whether I can take on a stranger, he who he may."

Allen bowed and had no more to say.

" If the firm you worked under cannot take you on, I fear you have little chance, Allen; for all are circumstanced like myself, I believe."

Allen shook his head, and would trespass no longer on Mr. Wentworth's time.

In the street he met Bray, who was looking for him to say farewell, while Hannah was doing the same to little Martha. Where were they going, and why so soon?

There was nothing to stay for now, Bray thought; for he had no liking to see honest men stand idle in the labour-market, except by their own choice. Choice made the entire difference in the case. As for where he was going,—he and Hannah must find out where people were most fond of street music and dancing, and would pay the best for it. And this put him in mind of what he had to say. He was as much obliged as Hannah herself, and more, by the

hospitality with which she had been received at Allen's house ; but his friend could not suppose he meant his daughter to be any charge upon the family in times like these. On this account, and for old friendship's sake, and from the sympathy which one proscribed man should feel for another, he hoped Allen would do him the favour to pocket this little bit of paper and say no more about it.—Allen agreed so far as to defer saying much about it till better times should come. He only just told Bray that the bank note was most acceptable at present for a very particular purpose, wrung his friend's hand, and ran home to fetch his wife, that the suit of clothes might be rebought without loss of time. They proved a dear bargain ; but that was a secondary consideration, poor as Allen was. He went to rest that night, satisfied that his honour was redeemed, and that his wife would scarcely venture to put it in pawn again.

His wife said to herself that she had no idea he could have been so stern as he was all this day ; she scarcely knew him for William Allen.—Many people made the same observation from this time forward. His sternness only appeared when matters of honour were in question, and no one who knew by what means he had been made jealous on this point wondered at the tone of decision in which a once meek and timid man could speak. But there were other circumstances which made them scarcely able to believe him the same William Allen. He no longer touched his hat to the masters, or appeared to

see them as they passed: He no longer repaired to the Spread-Eagle to hear or tell the news, or to take part in consultations on the affairs of the workmen of Manchester, though he was ever ready to give his advice with freedom and mildness when called upon. He stated that he was a friend to their interests, and therefore anxious to avoid injuring them by being one of the body. He would not even represent his children, who grew up one after another to be employed in the factories, while their father toiled in the streets with his water-cart in summer and his broom in winter; enduring to be pointed out to strangers as the leader of an unsuccessful strike, as long as his family were not included with himself in the sentence of proscription.

When will it be understood by all that it rests with all to bring about a time when opposition of interests shall cease? When will masters and men work cheerfully together for their common good, respect instead of proscribing each other, and be equally proud to have such men as Wentworth and William Allen of their fellowship?

*Summary of Principles illustrated in this
volume.*

COMMODITIES, being produced by capital and labour, are the joint property of the capitalist and labourer.

The capitalist pays in advance to the labourers their share of the commodity, and thus becomes its sole owner.

The portion thus paid is **WAGES**.

REAL WAGES are the articles of use and consumption that the labourer receives in return for his labour.

NOMINAL WAGES are the portion he receives of these things reckoned in money.

The fund from which wages are paid in any country consists of the articles required for the use and consumption of labourers which that country contains.

THE PROPORTION OF THIS FUND RECEIVED BY INDIVIDUALS MUST MAINLY DEPEND ON THE NUMBER AMONG WHOM THE FUND IS DIVIDED.

The rate of wages in any country depends, therefore, not on the wealth which that country contains, but on the proportion between its capital and its population.

As population has a tendency to increase

faster than capital, wages can be prevented from falling to the lowest point only by adjusting the proportion of population to capital.

The lowest point to which wages can be permanently reduced is that which affords a bare subsistence to the labourer.

The highest point to which wages can be permanently raised is that which leaves to the capitalist just profit enough to make it worth his while to invest his capital.

The variations of the rate of wages between these extreme points depending mainly on the supply of labour offered to the capitalist, the rate of wages is mainly determined by the sellers, not the buyers of labour.

Combinations of labourers against capitalists (whatever other effects they may have) cannot secure a permanent rise of wages unless the supply of labour falls short of the demand;—in which case, strikes are usually unnecessary.

Nothing can permanently affect the rate of wages which does not affect the proportion of population to capital.

Legislative interference does not affect this proportion, and is therefore useless.

Strikes affect it only by wasting capital, and are therefore worse than useless.

Combinations may avail or not, according to the reasonableness of their objects.

Whether reasonable or not, combinations are

not subjects for legislative interference ; the law having no cognizance of their causes.

Disturbance of the peace being otherwise provided against, combinations are wisely therefore now left unregarded by the law.

The condition of labourers may be best improved,—

1st. By inventions and discoveries which create capital.

2d. By husbanding instead of wasting capital :—for instance, by making savings instead of supporting strikes.

3d. BY ADJUSTING THE PROPORTION OF POPULATION TO CAPITAL.

